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# ROUGH HEWN.

BY

MRS. DAY,

AUTHOR OF

"FROM BIRTH TO BRIDAL,"

&c. &c.

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends  
Rough hew them how we will."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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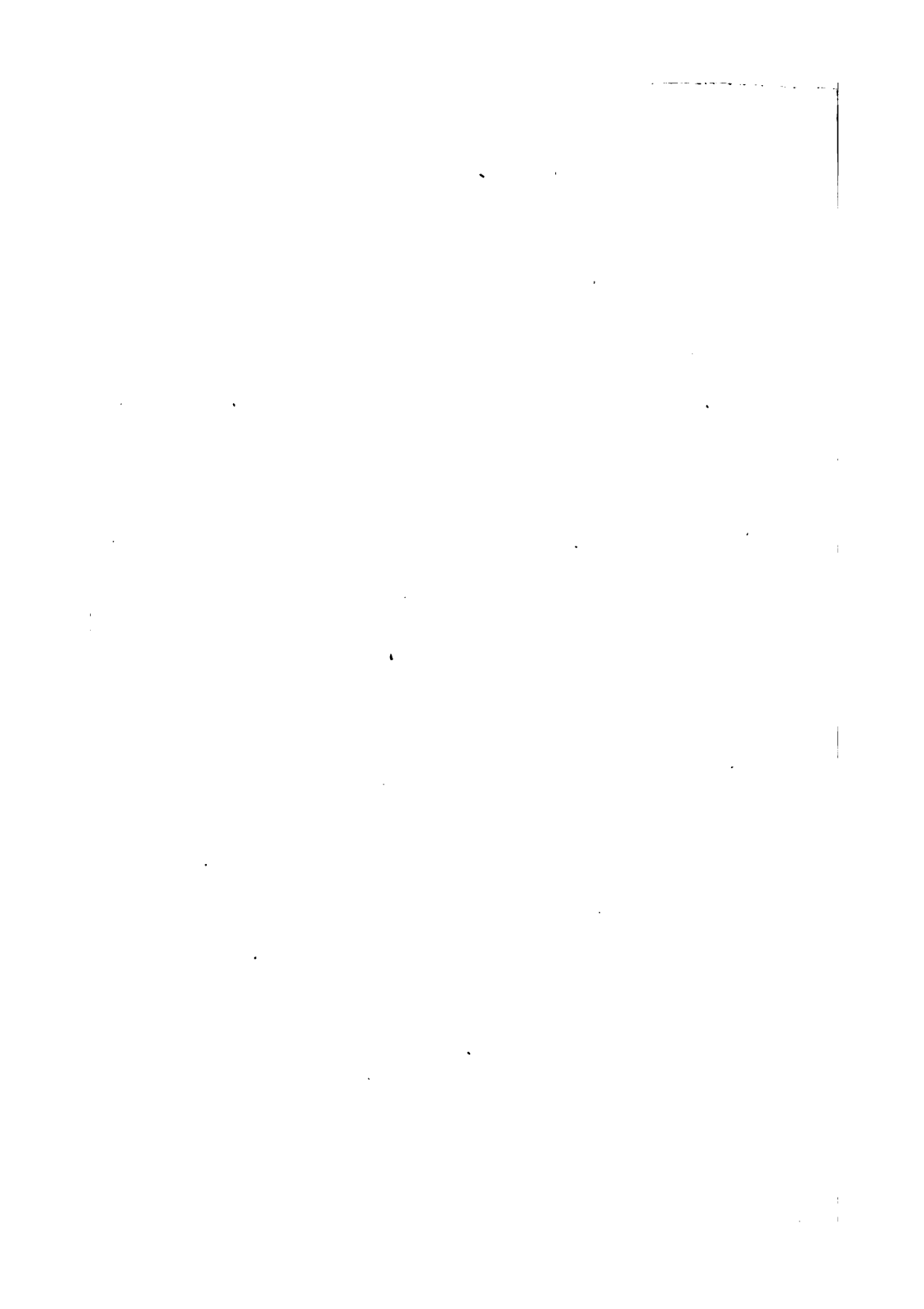
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## BOOK IV

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I held it truth, with him who sings  
To one clear harp in diverse tones,  
That men may rise on stepping-stones  
Of their dead selves to higher things.

Inconstancy means raw : 'tis faith alone means ripe.



# ROUGH HEWN.

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## CHAPTER I.

“**T**HERE is Ned! Listen!” said Mrs. Barton, leaning suddenly forward in the low wicker chair in which she was seated at work, with a basket at her feet, full of various articles that needed repairs. “There is Ned at last!”

She had said the same words long ago, when she had waited for his return from Riverford, and then with greater anxiety than her tone now expressed. Many an evening, sitting with her husband, she had heard the clicking of the gate, and the quick step upon the gravel path, and leaned forward, listening, knowing that the silent room would be cheered and brightened by her son’s presence; many a time she had broken the long silence by those very words;



but then they fell unremarked, for it was in the natural order of things that they should be spoken, and he expected. Now the whole train of circumstances was changed.

Edith, the youngest girl, who was at home with her mother, and who was busy at a piece of French translation in the window to make the most of fading daylight, lifted her head quickly towards the table, where a lamp was burning for her mother.

"Mamma, are you dreaming? Ned is in Australia. He would write before he came back to us."

Mrs. Barton had risen, and was standing in the middle of the room; and Edith, following the direction of her eyes, saw a tall figure outside, behind whom the gate had closed, coming slowly towards the house. In another moment Edmund entered the passage, and his mother had gone out to meet him, and was weeping silently against his breast. He held her close with his strong arm, and stroked her face, her hair, her dress, saying no distinct words, but uttering low murmuring sounds, like a mother soothing an ailing child; and she was

soothed and comforted by the firm, protecting arm, and yet more by the few heavy tears that fell upon her hair.

Presently she lifted herself up, putting him from her at arm's length, and looking at him earnestly :

"My son—my boy!" she said; "so grown, so changed! Ned!—no, that name fits you no more. Such a tall, bearded, grave-eyed man should have no pet name. I have lost my boy, but I have found—my son, my stay. Is it not so, Edmund?"

From that time she rarely called him by any other name. Then she drew him into the parlour, and seated him in his father's chair. When he would have declined it, she said gravely,

"It is your right, Edmund. He is gone, and has left me here alone, and you came too late to see him. I will tell you everything by-and-by. Now, I cannot—it is too soon."

She laid her head upon the table and wept, though only by the heaving of her shoulders could one know that she was weeping.

"A sad greeting for my son," she said at

last. "I was wrong to tell you so suddenly of his death."

"No, mother, I knew it. I went first to him."

Then she smiled through her tears, like the pale gleam of the sun through masses of soft grey clouds.

"I have indeed found my son. In his voice, and in his eyes, I find a change; but it lies deeper still—it is in the heart and life. Oh! Edmund, how I have bewailed your loss, how I have grudged you to that distant land! And now I feel I grudged you to God. How little we know, how short-sighted we are! We fancy we can plan for ourselves, and for our dear ones; and God overrules all our plans, and leads us by ways we know not."

Edith stood aside and watched timidly the gestures of her brother. That wonderfully close and touching relationship of mother and son, where there is suitability, needed nothing to complete it, and could ill have borne the intervention of another person. He saw her at last, standing blushing, shy of this grown man who was her brother, more known to her by repute

than by her own acquaintance. He drew her to him, drew her on to his knee, and stroked her fair hair.

“You were the little one—our father’s pet. We will talk by-and-by. There is nothing I can say to-night. Thoughts come too quick, and my heart is full.”

Words that express deep emotion are often very simple, and only to the understanding ear do they convey all their meaning.

Tenderly, as if they had been sacred things, he took into his hand at supper the table articles he had known from boyhood. The tall jug for beer, the silver mug his godfather had given him, the old-fashioned wooden bread-trencher, and the dish of white ware, with coloured fishes round it, in which was fresh honeycomb, and which had been associated in his mind since childhood with rich gorse-tinted and flavoured honey. Was he asleep and dreaming? or which was the dream—this present, or that past time, when he rode across great plains, or under forest stretches? Mechanically he opened the Bible that Edith laid before him at night, and read aloud where he found the marks placed—read

also the short evening prayers, as his father had done; the little maid-servant looked with awe, mingled with admiration, on the powerful frame, the bronzed complexion, and the keen, resolute eye of "the new master," as she designated him, and studied him so carefully and critically, that she forgot to say Amen in the right places, and then left it unsaid altogether, lest she should put it in the wrong.

He asked himself, was he awake or dreaming? When there were no sounds to be heard but the notes of corn-crake and night-jar, and the swaying of the trees in a light Summer wind, Edmund bid his mother tell him of his father, and of all that had passed during the seven years he had been away. She told him all in detail; he listened, but said nothing.

"Thank you, mother," he said at last; "go to bed now. I have kept you up too late already. Go and sleep, mother, and let me think. I will talk to you about myself some other time. Your life has been continuous—an even stretch; but mine, the part you do not know has been a piece let in, having nothing to do with the rest. To-night I have to take up my English life ex-

actly where I dropped it, though it can hardly be so. No years are without their results and influence upon those that come after."

He went up to his old bed-room, round the window of which he had trained the luxuriant white rose, and which, in love and memory of him, his father had carefully trimmed. His mother came and bent over him in the early Summer dawn, with the green and pale violet tints in the eastern heaven, and watched him as she had often done when he was a child. This powerful man, with curling brown hair and arm thrown over his head, was her own, her son.

"Tender heart and true," she thought. "He said he went to him—to his father, first; he went to his grave, then."

And as she stood thinking, he became conscious of her presence, and awoke and looked at her.

"Go to bed, mother," he murmured, "I am very tired," as he had often done when a boy.

"I went first to him," he had said.

So sure was he he should not find his father living, that on his arrival in London he had

not delayed to write home and announce his advent; the time hung so heavily from his landing, that he felt as if nothing but lightning could convey him swiftly enough to High-beeches. During his voyage he had resigned himself to his fate, reading, writing a journal of his Australian life, and fashioning the pearl shells into dainty little ornaments for his sisters; but once on English soil, he could not rest, his heart chased him home. He could not stay to sleep or eat; he bought some food, and ate it as he walked towards the station; and when he reached Riverford, although he recognized some faces, he only looked at them and hurried on. He walked on through the station-yard carrying his bag, watched by a few idlers, who thought him "an awkward customer," or as "having seen service," and strode down the High Street, observing with surprise how few changes there were; then he struck into the lane and across the fields, a six miles walk to the gate of "the Rides." There he rested a while (he was very near the end), seated himself on a felled tree and thought; pictured to himself his father's face, his smile and cheery welcome, his mother's

kind blue eyes, her kiss, but—what changes might not be in that quiet cottage home; a fear crept over him, that he should go into the house and find the windows closed, and all silent; mount the stair, enter his father's room, and see there stretched motionless, sightless, dead, the bodily form that had been the outward manifestation of his father, the envelope in which his kindly soul had here been shrouded. He shrank aghast from this; he could better bear any other mode of learning he was fatherless. He dreaded to go on, dreaded to hear from others, dreaded to learn in this painful fashion all the truth; but he remembered there was one place of silent witness for him, one place where no one would look upon his sorrow, where no words would be needed. He walked out into the road, turning away from Wood Cottage to High-beeches church; he opened the lych gate with a beating heart, and crossed the church-yard by the diagonal path, to the south east corner where the great ash-trees grew, where the westering sun ever threw his beams, and where the stone memorials of his dead relatives stood—grandfathers and grandmothers,



uncles and aunts, brother and sisters. He saw the grass was trampled as he approached the spot; he saw the corner of one old slab had been broken and lately mended, and he saw freshly turned soil, grass not having hidden the marks of the sexton's shovel; then he lifted his eyes and saw graven upon the stone—

IN LOVING MEMORY OF  
MARK BARTON,  
ELDER SON OF THE ABOVE,  
*Who departed this life April 28th, 185—,*  
*Aged 57.*

His father had died, then, three months ago, and he had made this long journey in vain, and had come too late. There he sat down and thought. He had meant to do this, he had meant to do that, he had made plans, and for a time he seemed to be moving towards his own ends, but the disposition of things was in other hands, and behold he was doing God's work and pleasure, and not his own. He had loved his father in a heedless boyish fashion, but with little respect; there had been many reasons for this, and not without weight, but now that he was gone he remembered only his better qualities, and felt

with shame and grief that he had not loved him enough, and had caused him pain and trouble. He sat there dry-eyed and stern; his heart was full of bitter regret and self-reproach, and not of the tenderness of sorrow. It was not till he had seen his mother's pale cheek, and the bereaved lonely expression in her face, that he felt through her; then for *her* loss, which he understood by sympathy, and not for his own did the heavy tears fall on her hair.

Edmund awoke with the sunlight streaming into his room, with the sounds of thrushes singing and cocks crowing in his ears, and from the distance the sound of whetted scythes. He wondered into what strange land he had dropped. These were not the sounds of the life he had been leading in the great plains; still less were they those of the dreary and monotonous life on board ship of which he had been dreaming—imagining himself to be in one vessel that pursued, and never overtook, another in which he knew his father to be.

What was this scent of new-mown hay, roses and honeysuckle, that came in puffs into his room as the wind rose, and fell? What was the cause

of the chequered fluttering bars of light and shadow on the walls and floor? What gave the tint to the golden sunshine, as if the sun rays came through a thin green veil? He wondered at all this, and slowly remembered that he was in England, and that these things had been familiar to him once. He had been so used to rising at daybreak that he got up now, moving softly not to awake his mother, and walked through the garden into the woods, and out into the meadows, where the men were mowing. He watched them moving slowly in ranks—it all seemed unreal; they did not know him, though he could have called nearly all of them by name; it was Lord Riverford's land, and his father had selected those mowers and paid them many a year. It was only *he* had changed, and only by degrees did he know how greatly.

“Whilst you are about your house-keeping, mother, I will write to McLean,” he said at breakfast. “In the afternoon you and Edith will come with me into the fields; we can sit there and talk as it grows cool, just as we used to do. I am so strange yet that you must wait

till I get accustomed to it all. I never had an idea that I should return to England; and though I have forgotten nothing, I stowed it all away in deep corners, and shall have to hunt it out and dust and air it, so to speak. I wonder how you would like to go to Australia? Do you think you would?—for there I could provide for you all comfortably.”

Mrs. Barton looked perplexed and sad, and Edmund knew that the shadow of the new-made grave fell upon her spirits, and that, were she to leave its neighbourhood, she would never cease to desire to see it, to be laid one day to rest there. For the present he resolved to forbear to urge her to alter her life or views.

Edmund sat at home, writing to his old friend, and reading, and his mother came in from her kitchen now and then, with the excuse of wanting string, paper, or her keys, to look at him and get his grave smile; she wondered if any other woman had a son so good and docile, who could sit all day alone without giving trouble, or complaining, forgetting that this very son of hers might do it now and then, because he had not the slightest intention of doing it always.

Out of doors the great white lilies drooped in the hot sun, the grasshoppers chirped, the sparrows fought and chattered in and out among the shrubs, and the waggons laden with hay to be stacked passed down the lane.

“Would you not like me to send a message in to Riverford to your uncle Charles, to ask him to come over to see you, Edmund? Would you rather stay away from Riverford? I can easily send.”

“On no account, mother. I’ll go myself, of course, to the Brewery; but I may bring my uncle out here, if you please.”

Mrs. Barton did not quite understand this son of hers yet, with his modesty and his pride. She fancied he might, for a time, dislike to meet people he had left when under a cloud; but the cloud had passed away from him, and had left his nature serene, upright, and pure, fearless of all unfavourable comments.

Sitting in the wood shadows, Edmund heard in silence the story of his family.

“Then in fact, mother, you have nothing but your own little property and what Julia earns, and the rent of the Warrens, to depend upon?”

he asked at last. "The cottage my father held, of course, in virtue of his office. If we continue to live there, we ought to pay rent for it now. It appears to me we had better sell 'the Warrens,' so as to make a certain provision for you; and the girls and I will do what we can for ourselves. However, we will call Uncle Charles into the conclave, the sooner things are settled the better—disagreeable ones especially."

"My dear boy, sell 'the Warrens!' Why, you may come to live there."

"No, mother," he said, shaking his head. "I can earn a certain livelihood in Australia. If you all care to emigrate I can make a home for you, but here I doubt if I could do more than barely keep myself—at any rate, for a long time."

"I should like to emigrate," said Edith, timidly putting her hand in her brother's, "but I fancy mamma and Julia would rather stay at home. Could that be managed?"

"I daresay it might be. I could take you and Fanny abroad; you would have enough to do, I can tell you; and then we could put everything together that was possible for our mother

and Julia to live in this country. How are you holding the cottage now ?”

“Lord Riverford was good enough to say we were to remain there until you came home, and then he would consider the matter. Julia saw him ; he has a new steward, who lives in a house up Mill Lane.”

“And my father has done no work for him for more than a year. Then it is very kind and considerate of Lord Riverford, but I must free myself from that obligation. I will see his lordship in a day or two. It was charming of him to be so good to my mother, and I daresay it pleased him to be kind, and I shall thank him gratefully, but *I* must receive no favours that I cannot in any way repay. Don’t grieve, mother dear,” he said, stooping and fondling her, as he saw tears standing in her eyes, “you shall stay in the cottage, if I can hire it ; besides, you have kept a brave, patient heart all these years, you can trust God a little longer, can you not ? I hate the ordinary phrase of ‘waiting on Providence,’ it is nearly as bad as ‘waiting to see what may turn up,’ and generally means idle, selfish ease, with somebody else to be preyed upon ; but

that was not my mother's order of going at all, and she will not begin now," he said, drawing her hand through his arm. "Let us go home, the sun is quite low behind the trees; do you see how the colours have altered? in this field there is no light at all, and the dew is rising. I will go to London and fetch my baggage to-morrow, and see my uncle in Riverford, and the following day will see the Earl."

Mrs. Barton gave herself up to her son's guidance, not that she was weak and could not guide her own affairs, she had been for a long time the moving spirit in the house, and had for the most part discreetly ordered her own, her husband's and her children's affairs, but she was of the class that "have greatness thrust upon them," and she was naturally so gentle and submissive that she abdicated her authority the moment her son appeared able to wield it; besides, her own views and wishes were negative rather than positive; she knew what she disliked, but she had served a long, patient apprenticeship to unpleasant things. In her deep, tender love for Mark she had learned to find her pleasure in his comfort; he had been much more easy to please



than she was, *but* he was gone, and what mattered anything much to her ? A little patience and time, and she would rejoin him to whom she had been guide and stay.

## CHAPTER II.

"COME round to the window, and let me look at you, Ned," cried Charles Barton, when his nephew had presented himself at the Brewery. "I doubt very much if I should have known you had I met you in London, my lad, though you have a great look of your father in eyes and complexion. Your poor mother is a proud woman to get you home again, I'll be bound. I would have come over to see you if you had let me know."

But Ned persisted that it was his duty to come first, and that he wanted to see the old town again, as well as to have a private conference about many things, before talking them over with his mother.

"However, you will come back with me to High-beeches and stay all night," Ned said. "I

want to see Lord Riverford to-morrow, and I should like you to wait till after I have seen him, so that we may make our arrangements and start afresh. I sent a note up to the Hall this morning."

"Not a bit of use. Did not your mother know that Lord Riverford was in London? I dare say Lady Riverford is at the Hall. I know she has visited your mother several times since your father's death."

"I said nothing about it to my mother. I wrote to request the favour of an interview to-morrow. I must get the question of that cottage settled at once; I cannot have my mother living at Lord Riverford's expense, when I am able to work for her."

"I understood they were glad to help her. I would have paid the rent myself if that would have pleased you."

"Not at all—I did not mean that. I must take my own responsibilities. You have done a great deal for my parents always, and I am greatly indebted to you; and you suffered severely through my father, I know. There has been enough of that. I must see now what is

best to do, and I mean to support my mother. Is there anything to be done that I can get to do in England whilst I am here?—for I shall not conceal from you, whatever I may do to my mother, that I cannot contemplate anything but return to Australia. I would, indeed I did, suggest that she and the girls should return there with me. I understand that life. I can keep them comfortably, with luck, even in luxury; they would be of the greatest use, and add materially to my prosperity; but there is one thing that militates against it, and it is almost insuperable: my mother's great disinclination to leave home. You must not try to urge her. I shall not; I respect her feelings, for I understand them. How can she leave his grave? Every tree and hedge and common speaks of past happy hours with him. His voice, his eyes, meet her at every turn about this neighbourhood. He was her life. Don't shake your head and smile, Uncle Charles; it is not a mere bit of sentiment, but good, honest sense. I love her for it. Of course, being what he was to her, though neither you nor I can quite understand it, she wishes to be

at least where his image dwells. Why should I urge upon her to make so great a sacrifice for me? I am so sure of her feelings that I do not doubt for a moment that it would be less pain to her to let us go out to Australia to live, and remain here herself, than to go out with us all and leave her memories. You may think me weak in the matter, when it would be for her worldly interest to go; but I shall not interfere with her. More than that, if she proposed it, I should put difficulties in her way—I could not feel happy to let her sacrifice herself for me. No, it will entail different plans than I had proposed to myself, and harder work—perhaps a little self-sacrifice; but I must keep her and Julia in Wood Cottage, or some other cottage hereabouts, and the two younger girls can go with me. It will be good for them; there are so many contingencies abroad.”

“But, Ned—well, upon my word, I hardly know how to put it to you. I have no right to make ill-natured remarks, or to throw cold water on your schemes; but—I am your uncle, and it is best to be plain, and speak straightforwardly.”

"Undoubtedly it is; speak away, Uncle Charles; say what you like. I am not proud, as the saying goes. I ought to say I am proud to learn. I daresay you will help me."

"Well, then, my boy, do you think you are a fit protector for two young girls? Do you think you are not overrating your power of supporting them all? I am an old stager, I know—very likely prejudiced, but I have found it hard to earn a good living in England; and yet I would rather earn a crust here than a roasted swan abroad—prejudiced, I daresay, but living abroad is very precarious after all. I have only got to look at you to see how improved you are, Ned; but still you may be too sanguine, and you are hot-headed and hot-hearted too, and that won't do if you have the responsibility of your sisters upon you. You ought to be older—a grave, sensible, and self-denying man. I don't say you're not—I don't say that."

"But still you doubt me a little?" said Ned, smiling. "Well, Heaven knows, you had reason enough!—but—" and he dropped his head a little and played with his stick upon the floor—"I believe I am a good deal altered, and that I

am to be trusted now. I think I can do what I propose, and I have thought about it. The notion is not rashly taken up; I have a very good berth, and the sooner I get back to it the better. And my 'boss,' as they call him, is a good friend to me. I don't want to scheme for the girls, but I think they could marry in the colony far better, and be more accounted of than here at home; and as for having to work hard and do a little extra self-denial, I can only answer, as I used to do on Sundays in my catechism, 'By God's help, so I will.'"

"Amen," said Uncle Charles gravely; "but you may want to marry yourself some day," he added with a smile.

"Perhaps, I cannot say. I can leave that till it comes. But now what can you do for me? I may as well earn my own keep whilst I am obliged to be at home. I do not care much what it is. I would go and keep old Smart's books over the way for him and break sugar, and grind coffee in the interval, if nothing better offers. Perhaps you think I am too big and strong for that?"

"No, lad, I was laughing because I thought

what a gentleman you have turned out, and that on Fridays you would have old Smart's shop full of all the pretty girls, to look at the handsome shopman ; they'd think they could buy all their fid-fads at your counter. He'd have to keep a general shop, because they would not go any where else for pins and ribbons and pearl powder. But, seriously, if you have made up your mind to go back, your difficulty would be in getting a temporary place here. I can give you nothing in the Brewery. You saw the name over the gate as you came in, I suppose, so you know I have got a partner. We have opened a branch at Altcaster, where I am thinking of going to live myself, and your old place is occupied. They might have something that would suit you in the Bank,—h'm, they might. I'll go across and ask, by-and-by ; but I'm—af—raid—it's hardly likely, and for only a short time. If you had been at home now, you might have stepped into your poor father's shoes, and been Lord Riverford's steward—but of course he had to fill that post up directly."

"If I had been at home, I should perhaps have learned by this time something of book-



keeping and brewing—but I should not have made a good steward. Now indeed I know something about land, and crops, and cattle—but in a wild sort of way. Never mind, there is still Smart to fall back upon; it might be of the greatest use to me to learn something of sugars, and rice, and currants, &c. When I go back I might go shares with some fellow and open a store. I'll go and have a talk with Smart presently. Is Patty married yet? and does she wear her ringlets still? I don't suppose she'd know me."

"I don't think she would; but she is married pretty well too, to a young fellow who was assistant at Drake's the chemist. Ned," he said suddenly, "have you seen Miss Blount yet? You should go and see Miss Blount; she was very kind to your father and mother. And have you come across Gilbert Drake?" and he eyed him closely.

"No, I have not seen that worthy yet; I cannot say I wish to do so, he is a bad man, and was a very bad acquaintance for me. I shall not go to Miss Blount till I have something to do; she must not think I come for aid to her,

though I know she would give it me cheerfully, but I should see the disapproval in her face. She will hear some time that I am returned, and she can come over to my mother when she likes, and when she wants to see me she can say so. That is my pride, Uncle Charles, if it be pride; as we all are inclined to flatter ourselves a little, I should call it modesty and self-respect, not pride. Can you tell me anything about the Lesters? Julia has written once or twice about Rose Lester; she seems much attached to her. Except Miss Lester, I do not think I have anyone else I care to ask after. The Lion stands where it did, and the post-office; the town-hall looks just the same as it did of old; and I saw the Conduit as I came down running as it used to do, a donkey drinking from the stone basin on one side, and the fishmonger's boy washing a handful of plaice on the other. Nothing is changed but me, and I look at everything with quite other eyes." He was lounging in his chair with one leg crossed over the other, and his head leaning on his hand; he stroked his moustache thoughtfully, and passed his hand across his brow and eyes. "I remember all and

everything, just as one does when one cannot decide whether one has really done a thing or only dreamed it. But will you come out with me now, or wait till to-morrow? We will have long yarns about my colonial experiences. Edith cannot hear enough. I meant to have gone to town this afternoon for my traps, but I will wait to see what message there is from the Hall. I must write about my cockatoo."

"I will leave some orders and get my hat, and come out with you now, my boy. I have not seen my sister for a week or more."

As they went, Charles Barton gave Ned all the local news, and told him of Rose Lester's habitual residence at Stonefield and her frequent visits to Riverford; of her great kindness to his brother's family, and of her long hours of watching with Julia during his brother's illness; but he believed she was in London just now with her parents.

Ned cared nothing for the local news, the county ball, the yeomanry, the assizes; he answered now and then, just to show he was listening, but he was thinking of his old life, of Summer and Winter days, the look of the fields

and hedgerows at the different seasons, and the varied sounds of toil ; and he remembered Rose Lester's sweet bright face, like the flower she was called, and with her remembrance came another—that of the young girl with dark hair, who had believed in him, who had fled because, in his acquaintance with Rose, he had suddenly become aware he did not love her. He must learn somehow about her—but how ? Over and over as his uncle talked he turned the matter in his mind.

To himself he said, “Thou shalt by no means come out thence till thou has paid the uttermost farthing !” When conscience awakes, and the sense of duty and right has become strong, there is no rest for a man till he has set himself to the work of reparation. He had never forgiven himself for his unkind desertion in his fear and ignorance, although he had learned that it was well he knew, before he had destroyed his life and hers, that he had no real love for her.

In the evening there came a note from Lady Riverford, saying that the Earl was in London, but that she had forwarded him Mr. Barton's

letter, to which he would doubtless reply; and she begged to offer her congratulations to Mrs. Barton and her son on his safe return and their re-union.

Lord Riverford, in answer, begged Mr. Barton to call upon him in London, either at the Carlton Club, or at his private house in St. James's Square, on such a day, and at a given hour. Ned presented himself on the appointed day in St. James's Square, and, on giving his card to the servant, was at once admitted: the servant was old, and interested in his master's affairs.

"His lordship had given orders that Mr. Barton should be shown into the library. Would Mr. Barton follow him? His lordship was engaged for the moment with Captain Forteith, the traveller, and Mr. Crawford (a well-known member of the Lower House); but he would see Mr. Barton. And you'll excuse me, sir, but I have seen you when I have been up at the Hall, some years ago now. And you're very much altered—not like the same man at all, sir."

Then he threw open the door of the library, and announced, "Mr. Edmund Barton."

Ned advanced from the great Indian screen that protected the door, across a noiseless Turkey carpet, into a large, light, quiet room lined with books—for Lord Riverford was a great reader—and furnished with plain-looking but valuable carved tables and chairs. Ned saw at a glance his ideal library. The conversation going on was very animated between its denizens, each man having something to say, and having gone there expressly to say it. Mr. Crawford, grave and keen, was almost buried in a deep armchair. Captain Forteith was sitting on one corner at a table, swinging his leg, with hair thrown back and eager eyes; and Lord Riverford, leaning against the high carved mantel-piece, with his back to the fireless grate, was twisting in his fingers a piece of scented verbena, pulled from the *jardinière* in the window. On seeing Ned he drew himself up, and went a few steps to meet him, holding out his hand.

“How do you do, Mr. Barton? My friends will have left me in a few minutes, and then I shall be quite at your service. Let me introduce

you to them. Mr. Edmund Barton—Captain Forteith, Mr. Crawford.”

The gentlemen bowed, and the Earl watched the young man; he was on the point of saying, “The son of my late steward,” but there was something in Ned’s eye and bearing that gave him a perfectly distinct individuality; he was himself, and not the son of anybody; he needed no backing up. So the Earl said, with a discriminating courtesy,

“You are like your father, Mr. Barton, but less so than you gave promise to be when I saw you some years ago. I am glad to see you again.”

Ned simply bowed, and Lord Riverford continued, turning to his friends :

“Mr. Barton has just returned from Australia. His colonial experience may possibly be of value. I, for one, shall be glad to ask him some questions.”

“From Australia !” cried Mr. Crawford, sitting upright in his chair. “Any direct information is extremely valuable on all colonial questions.”

Captain Forteith settled himself more com-

fortably on the table, and in a short time Ned found himself talking gravely and clearly, and giving information to his interested hearers upon matters that he had been hardly conscious he had done more than observe. The keeping of sheep and cattle, their increase, their wool and hides, the rotation of crops, and the probable suitability of one crop rather than another, were all discussed, and his vivid descriptions of gold-diggings and gold-diggers were appreciated. Mr. Crawford rose at last looking at his watch in some surprise.

"I have been listening to you with so much pleasure, Mr. Barton, that time has slipped away. I must make haste now. I ought to be at Westminster. A hansom cab must set matters a little straighter. Are you in town, may I ask? I should very much like to go more fully into some points with you. You have made good use of your time, I fancy. Would it be encroaching too much upon your hours to ask you to call on me any Wednesday afternoon, or quite early in the morning on other days? There is my card."

"My time is quite my own," said Ned, smil-



ing, "I am sorry to say. I shall be too happy to wait upon you."

"You fortunate man!" replied Crawford, gravely. "'That fine old gentleman, Leisure,' as some one has said, is not often to be met with in these hurrying times. I regret to say I have but scant acquaintance with him. Make the most of yours."

"Did I not hear you say," asked Captain Forteith, as he was about to follow Mr. Crawford from the room, and shaking hands with Ned, "that you had made some collections? Could you contrive to let me see them? I am at the 'Travellers,' and shall be glad to see you."

"They are so scanty—so slight," said Ned, and a blush rose to his brows. "I am half ashamed of having mentioned that I had collected at all. It was to please my mother."

"An excellent reason," said Forteith, smiling, more pleased with the ingenuous blush and confession than he had been with the young man's good sense and keen observation. "But a collection is valuable not so much for its size as for acquaintance with its component parts."

I shall be indebted to you for every detail you can give me. Come and see me."

"Not a bad beginning, Mr. Barton," said Lord Riverford, when they were left alone. "I congratulate you; you have made friends."

"I can dispense with compliments, if I can be put in the way of earning bread," answered Ned, a little sadly. "Will your lordship allow me to speak quite plainly, for the sake of my father, whom you knew well and befriended always, and in whose behalf and my mother's I owe you so many sincere thanks? I want to speak to you about my mother's cottage—to ask if you will buy the 'Warrens,' which I think I must sell. But I will tell you my position; I will not detain you long."

Ned gave a short account of his own engagements in Australia, and his situation with McLean, and spoke of his intention to return to him, and to take one or more of his sisters abroad, and of his wish to rent either Wood Cottage or some similar place, for his mother.

"You might let me have the pleasure of doing some little service to your mother," answered

Lord Riverford. "I have the greatest respect for her, and so has Lady Riverford."

"But you must respect her son also, my lord. I have no right to let my mother depend upon anyone but me. We are all deeply indebted to you, in ways that nothing can ever repay; but I want to settle affairs in this country as soon as possible, that I may return to the country of my adoption, and to work that I understand. The sooner I can go, the sooner I shall be able to meet my liabilities, and whilst I am at home I am very anxious to get some employment. I do not really care what it is. I could do journeyman's work at carpentering or at the forge. I can keep books, and write a tolerable letter, and I know something of French; but I doubt if they would suffice to secure me a secretaryship, had I interest enough to get one. It was not worth while to explain all this to Mr. Crawford when he thought me fortunate in calling my time my own. How often it has struck me that people can only understand things from their own point of view. Mr. Crawford has probably no idea of a man wanting to earn a pound a week—he would wonder what possi-

ble use so small a sum could be to him. With all his political economy he knows but little of the domestic form of science—or, rather, I should say, he has forgotten it, for he did not always fill one of the world's high places. Pleasure is a fine thing, but food and raiment are necessities. But I am digressing now. Will you kindly let me know if you will let the cottage to me, and at what rent; and also if you are disposed to buy the 'Warrens.' Do not speak to my mother about that—she would grieve at my parting with my father's old home. My uncle says I shall marry some day, and want to live there. But I cannot indulge in any such projects as long as my mother and sisters are dependent upon me; and I really see no better opening for me than to return to Australia."

"Have you lunched?" asked the Earl, not very relevantly to their conversation. "I have not. I am alone, and shall be glad of your company, if you will come with me into the dining-room. I shall be at the Hall in about ten days. We can settle these matters of business then."

Lord Riverford studied his guest with some

curiosity. When they parted he said inquiringly,

"You will go and call upon Mr. Crawford and Forteith, Barton, of course, before you leave town?"

"Do you advise me to do so? Were not their invitations merely complimentary? Had they met me accidentally, and not in your library, would they have been given?"

"I believe they would, because the men have sense and discernment, though you are probably right in supposing that my library added to your advantages. Do you regret that? I don't. Go and call upon them—a young man should make friends."

"I have not met such a fine young fellow for a long time," mused Lord Riverford, as he drove out to Richmond, where he was engaged to dine; "well-bred and perfectly simple and natural. Where did the man get such breeding? Now-a-days half the snobs one meets would say, 'With a large sum obtained I this breeding;' and a very queer sort it is, by Jove! and leaves them snobs after all. But this man is

as easy as old typical lords and nobles. His father—poor fellow! as good-hearted a man as ever lived—but he had not this man's sense or dignity. But his mother—ah! that's it, a lady every inch of her. I must have Master Edmund up at the Hall. My lady must see him. I will get her to be civil to him. I should like to know what she thinks of him; she will find it out if there is any false ring about him. *I think the metal is true.*"

## CHAPTER III.

“HALLO, Barton!” cried a cheery voice behind Edmund, about a fortnight after he had been in London, as he was wending his way home, with his fishing-rod and basket, up a long narrow lane that led from the mills upon the canal out to the Riverford road.

Ned turned round—Lord Riverford was trotting up on his dun cob, and soon reached him.

“I have only returned this morning to the Hall, and there is always a crowd of things to do as soon as I get home. I don’t believe the best middleman in the world ever sees with the master’s eye—that is, if the master has got any eyes. My steward and the miller there have been falling out, and have been abusing each other for some time past. I would not listen to them at first, but now I must; and old

Jeremiah Hitchcock—you have known him, of course, ever since you were a boy—has been telling me all his grievances. I fancy they sound more important in the Quaker tongue; and a very stiff Quaker Jeremiah is, his toes are as square as his house, but positively, now I think his statement over, there was more ‘thee’ and ‘thou’ in it than anything else, just ‘to give it flavour,’ I suppose. He was in a great passion, and it would have relieved him to swear once or twice, but he resisted the temptation manfully. How funny people are! I shall make my lady laugh at the story to-night. I have been rehearsing some of the words and gestures as I rode along. Have you had any sport?”

“Yes, I have a couple of jack, and two or three small things; this hazy afternoon was good for fishing, though I took my rod rather as an excuse for a long walk.”

“Come up to the Hall to-morrow, and we will talk over your matters. I shall be sure to be near home at one. Remember me to your mother. Good evening,” and the Earl put his horse into a trot again, but he had not gone very far before he pulled up and waited for Ned



to approach. "Have you got anything to do yet?"

"Not yet. My uncle applied at the post-office, and is to hear if they can find me a corner; if not, I shall go to Smart the grocer, and try my hand at sugar and spice, and audit his books for him."

"People are very funny indeed," said the Earl to himself as he rode away. "Fancy a man like that in a grocer's shop. He ought to lead a 'forlorn hope,' or he would make a fine muscular Christian parson, with that deep voice and square-cut brow; and he speaks of breaking sugar with as much coolness and satisfaction as another man would of having got his seat in Parliament or his step in the Guards. If this fellow had Beauchamp Ashley's chances, and old Ashley's money to back him, he would make a figure in the world."

In the lovely August morning, with heavy dew upon the grass, and the air heavy with sweet scent, Ned stood at his open window and looked out. Edith was downstairs, he could hear her fluttering about and whistling snatches of tunes. She was busy making pastry

and cakes, because Julia was coming home for a short holiday. Ned had had letters the previous day from McLean and Harry Dawson, and he was indulging a dream whether, if Edith went out to Australia, she was likely long to remain his housekeeper, or would not Harry transplant her shortly to his home, and he thought how prettily her fair hair and blue eyes would contrast with Harry's southern type. Now she was chirping to her canary, and now talking to his cockatoo, and the latter was, he knew, dancing on his perch, and setting up his beautiful bright crest. Then he heard the garden gate swing on its hinges, and the pattering of a dog's feet, then a low whimpering cry, a violent struggling and scuffling, a fall in the passage, and a volley of curses in a man's voice, then pitter-patter up the stairs, thump, thump of a dog's tail against his door; then the down-drop of the animal, and snuffing of the fine black nose under the door; then again the whimper, then silence, fresh snuffing, and thump, thump of the tail. Ned opened his door a little; the animal had risen, with dropped ears and head a little awry, listening, waiting, all his beautiful body

working with excitement; and there stood Victor, Ned's old setter. He made one bound into the room, and rearing up on his hind legs, he laid his feathered fore legs upon his master's breast, and gazed at him from his large, brown, liquid eyes, with cries of tenderness. Victor had mourned his master. He had fretted, he had refused his food, many times had returned to the house, when out with Mr. Barton, and hunted in every corner to find his own dear master, and had lain down at his door with a sigh or moan of disappointment. During Mr. Barton's illness the dog had been sent away, but as he had made his escape twice from Riverford and run home, he was sent off to Altcaster. Ned asked his uncle for him when he returned. Coming up the lane, it was all the boy in charge could do to hold him, so well did he know his way. At the gate he had a fierce struggle, but no sooner had Victor entered the house, than, scenting Ned's hat and coat hanging up, he leaped at them, and after some frantic efforts, with a bound he upset the boy in the hall, leaving him kicking and swearing, and rushed up-stairs. Ned fairly hugged his dog. "But you never can be the same to me as Lad-

die was, my boy !” he said, with tears in his eyes as he thought of the faithful Collie.

Victor lay with his nose between his paws, and upturned eyes, watching every movement of his master as he dressed, and beating his tail softly on the floor ; he followed Ned downstairs in a state of wonder and delight, and rubbed his soft nose against the beloved hand. At breakfast he sat gravely on his haunches, as if he had never ceased to share his master’s meal.

“I think you are looking better for native air already, my son,” Mrs. Barton said, when she gave Ned her morning kiss.

“Thank you, dear mother ; no air has come much amiss to me yet. I feel happy to-day. I hope I shall get some news of work from Uucle Charles ; and here is my dog again ; and—and I am relieved from—I have a feeling of being relieved from anxiety.”

He did not explain that, when walking through Riverford two days before, and earnestly thinking how he could ascertain Ellen Ward’s present circumstances, he had met a woman who looked at him hard, as if with recognition. Surprised for a moment, he remem-

bered in the next that it was the old cook at Gilbert Drake's. He walked quickly after her, and asked how she did, and where she was living.

"Still at Mr. Drake's," she said.

"And have you a fellow-servant?" he asked; "is Ellen Ward there, or can you tell me where she is? I am anxious to know."

"I'm glad to say I can tell you—but I'm not a-going to. It was not your fault, sir, that she didn't break her heart. Poor foolish thing! But she did herself one wise turn—she ran away and went straight to Miss Blount—the Lord love her! say I."

"Miss Blount!" he echoed. "Where is she, then, now?"

"I told you I wouldn't tell you, nor I won't; but you look a different sort of man now, though there was not much harm in you; and maybe you want to do what's right, as I know she does; and I've heard parson say we should help one another bear our troubles, and should feel kind like to one another; that be his readin' of charity, that be, so I'll tell you this much: Ellen—she's done well, and she's married now to a

good young fellow who's real fond of her. There now, that's about enough for you to know, if you're wishing her well."

"I am wishing her well, most certainly, and I never felt so glad of anything in my life as of what you have told me. I do not know how to thank you, and I will not ask another word."

Edmund's hand was in his pocket, but she observed him.

"No," she said, "there's no need of that, sir. You've had your own trouble maybe, as the rest of us have. I hope you're doin' well in Australia; it's an uncommon outlandish name for a outlandish place. Takes one nigh upon a year, I've heard, to get there. So you missed seein' your poor father? I'm sorry for that."

Gilbert Drake had not yet met Edmund Barton, but he saw the meeting that day between him and his cook, and recognised his air and gait; and he called the servant when she came in, and asked her to whom she had been speaking just now.

"He was just a strange man with mustachers," she replied astutely. "He never said his

name to me. He's a forriner, I think, or just from the shires—leastways, he's a stranger to me."

"Then what the devil had he got to say to you, hindering you from your work?"

"Well, sir, you might know him better nor me, for he asked quite kindly after you, that he did. But I'm hinderin' myself," she said, as she went away, with a smile in the corners of her mouth.

"Asked kindly for me? The devil he did!" growled Gilbert Drake.

No wonder Ned felt wonderfully refreshed in mind, calm and collected!

Edmund met Lord Riverford in his usual shepherd tartan coat, with his blue bird's-eye neckcloth all awry, and a spud in his hand, which he carried instead of a stick. He was going home by the Elm Avenue, hot and happy.

"You keep good time, Barton," he said, shaking hands; "I said one, and it wants just five minutes to the hour. I always think a punctual man is to be trusted. I wish to goodness you could have stepped into your father's shoes. I have got a wrong-headed fellow now,

who has ideas of his own, and does not endorse mine, and actually sometimes thinks me wrong."

"I might have ideas too," said Ned, laughing, "and might also not always endorse yours."

"H'm! well, so you might," said the Earl, with a frown, and some hesitation in his voice; but his face cleared up when he looked at the steady, firm countenance beside him, and thought that, "By Jove, he liked his spirit!"

He led the way into his study or den, where he could revel in litter and confusion, without fearing Lady Riverford's reproof, or an unsympathetic housemaid's dusters.

The lease of Wood Cottage was soon arranged. Lord Riverford asked the lowest rent he could name without exciting any suspicion of undue consideration, and he led Ned to hope he would possibly buy the Warrens.

"I will have the cottage lease prepared by my solicitor, and you shall sign it. I will speak to him about your property, and he shall go over it and report to me. Meantime, you have got a tenant, though I doubt he does not pay rent



high enough. I am much obliged to you for giving me first notice of your intention of selling."

"You have not lunched, of course?" inquired Lord Riverford, after an hour's talk on business. "I am hungry. Let us go to the drawing-room. I will present you to Lady Riverford, and you will take her in to luncheon."

The colour rose in Ned's cheek, not only because he felt a little nervous, but because he was going into a room of which he had heard—in which he had been, when quite a child, with his mother. He remembered some of the tapestry so well—"The Hawking Party," with horses of a most peculiar shape, ladies with strange head-dresses, and all the faces curiously twisted; "the burning of Troy," with Anchises on his son's back. And he remembered that, when the doors of the ante-room into the hall were open, gusts of wind came in and waved the hangings to and fro till the figures seemed alive, and all at once the great hall-door slammed to from the draught of air, and he was frightened at the silent, melancholy room in the fading Winter twilight. He had often thought

of it and been ashamed of his cowardice.

The new life within that tapestried room effectually drove away all the ghosts of the past. In it now were grouped Lady Riverford in a low chair, with a basket of coloured wools beside her, which she was converting, by the aid of long ivory knitting-pins, into a parti-coloured web. She only indulged herself with fancy-work when visitors were in the house. Captain Forteith—dressed in cool brown Indian linen, with a narrow crimson ribbon tied under his white collar, giving him rather a dandified appearance, though that was by no means his character—was describing scenes and adventures of foreign travel to the interested listener seated near him, no other than Rose Lester. Rose, with the grave brown eyes, and the sweet sensitive mouth, was clad in muslin, striped pale pink and white; the light from beneath the sun-blinds stole in and made little flecks of brightness on her hair and dress. With one hand resting on the back of her chair stood Beauchamp Ashley, listening also to Forteith's narrative, in a dreamy, gloomy silence; and at some little distance Mr. Ashley was reading a number of the *Cornhill Magazine*.

Beauchamp Ashley, after his explanation with Rose, had buried himself in Somersetshire; but he was restless and uneasy, and when the Summer had fairly come, an unaccountable desire to know if Edmund Barton had returned home, and how he was received by Rose, seized upon him; he wrote to the old butler to inquire about his *protégés* and his dogs, and asked him incidentally if young Barton were yet returned.

When Beauchamp knew that Edmund was at High-beeches, he could not rest till he had seen him. He had only reached Broadstone two days before this, and he persuaded his father to drive him over to Riverford Hall, intending to go thence to High-beeches village. He had heard Miss Lester was not at her brother's Vicarage; he had forgotten she might be at Riverford, and it was with the mingled surprise of pain and pleasure that he met her in the drawing-room at the Hall.

Ned gathered in one quick glance the points of interest in the room he well remembered. The long windows looking on to the terrace, wide open to admit the breeze that, laden with

sweets, waved the lace curtains to and fro ; the sunlight, carefully shaded by outside blinds, which were not too low to prevent the riband of brilliant-coloured flowers upon the terrace from being seen below them ; the *jardinières* full of flowers, the chandeliers and mirrors of Venetian glass, the chairs covered with amber and white damask, the carved and inlaid furniture, some of ebony inlaid with silver, and the hangings on the wall, no longer instinct with life, but forming a kind of neutral-tinted background, with their faded, mingled colours, that heightened the effect of the living group, which riveted all his attention.

Crossing the ante-room, the doors of which stood open into the great drawing-room, gave Ned time enough to observe all the details of the picture ; and then he found himself standing before Lady Riverford ; he heard his name spoken more than once—in introduction he supposed—and he bowed at each mention of it. Was he dreaming ? Forteith's voice awaked him.

“I am so glad to meet you again, Mr. Barton. I found your card at the club. Unfortu-

nately I was out. I particularly want to see you. I was speaking of you to Land, the geologist, the other day, and he is anxious to hear your observations upon the auriferous strata of Queensland. I promised to get you to dine with me, to meet him."

Ned smiled at the cordial address, and was conscious that a blush of pleasure had risen to Rose Lester's sweet face; he longed to interrupt the speaker, and claim her old acquaintance; but he restrained himself, and bowed to Forteith, then he turned his smiling face to Lord Riverford, saying low and rapidly,

"Highly flattering and complimentary, my lord, but not conducive to the earning of daily bread."

Then Rose Lester got up and advanced to him, holding out her hand. Her lips only said,

"I am so glad to see you again. I was intending to call on Mrs. Barton this afternoon;" but her eyes were more eloquent.

The frown gathered on Beauchamp Ashley's face; the two young men felt an instinctive dislike spring up between them.

Luncheon was announced. The Earl desired Edmund to conduct Lady Riverford into the dining-room, himself taking Rose. Ned acquitted himself very well at table, but could not keep his eyes from resting on two lovely baskets of fruit and flowers. Turning away to answer a remark of Mr. Ashley's, he encountered Lady Riverford's glance; she had been watching him. They both smiled.

"Do let me tell you," he said, "how much I admire them; how beautiful they are! The life I have led, though presenting endless beauty and grandeur of nature, contained no element of art. We had an abundant supply of food, but it was served in the homeliest fashion."

"For my own part," said Lady Riverford, "I like appreciative eyes, and do not at all hold with the '*nil admirari*' principle."

In the cool afternoon, when the Ashleys had taken their leave, Rose proposed to walk through the park to Wood Cottage; and Ned, whom the Countess had detained, was delighted to accompany her. Captain Forteith also asked permission to go with them, to which Edmund assented, though he would have preferred to be alone

with Rose, and for a moment contrasted shyly his mother's homely parlour with the luxurious house they were leaving. He could not refrain from saying something to this effect, but Forteith laughed.

"My dear Barton, I wanted to see you and your butterflies, not your house. I should also like to be introduced to your mother, who I have heard is a charming person," and he turned to Rose, as if from her he had received that information; then he added, "A traveller by profession like me has to pass a rough life, and a Highlander as I am has often very narrow means and very shabby surroundings, however blue his blood may be. I will answer for it my father's manse with eight children to keep, was plainer than any of Lord Riverford's farm-houses."

Edmund secretly resolved to take Forteith's lesson, and never again attempt to apologise for unavoidable shortcomings.

Mrs. Barton received her guests with her usual calm dignity. Captain Forteith found the cottage and its occupants so agreeable that he forgot the lapse of time and the seven o'clock

dinner-hour at the Hall. Edith was delighted to serve tea in the garden, in her grandmother Fielding's old Worcester china, with the Apostle spoons, and her own cakes in the chased silver basket. Mrs. Barton had formerly known many Scotch celebrities, and had spent more than one season in Edinburgh, and Forteith was pleased with her conversation. Edmund found time to thank Rose for her kind and generous aid, and to tell her how well he had thriven abroad. She smilingly returned with what pleasure she had rendered him the assistance he wanted, and told him how the money had been repaid.

"You will come and see Aunt Hannah," she added; "I am staying with her for a little while. But I am going back to Stonefield soon; you know, I daresay, that I usually live there?"

"I shall be very glad to come if you think she will care to see me, but I may go to London. My uncle has applied for a supernumerary clerk's appointment for me in the post-office. I am not used to being idle—besides, I *must* work."

"Whilst you are at home? Do you think of going out again?"



"Certainly. My intention is to take Edith and Fanny with me, and leave my mother and Julia here. I have occupation I understand, and good pay, abroad."

"That is a great matter," said Rose thoughtfully ; and then she was silent. James brought the pony carriage over at nine, and Rose took Captain Forteith as far as "the Rides" in her way home. Ned leaned over the gate and watched them drive away, and he thought that probably they were engaged to each other, or would be so shortly, and yet it was the happiest day he had ever spent, though he knew not why. There was something peculiarly flattering in Forteith's manner to Rose, arising from sympathy and mutual appreciation. Forteith had very early discovered a sad gentleness about Rose that spoke of disillusion, and the grave earnestness of a person who has thought, and has probed the depths of his own heart and spirit ; and he was not disposed to intrude upon and disturb her calmness, though he gave her the frank sympathy of a nature analogous to her own.

## CHAPTER IV.

“ I AM very glad to see you, Edmund; and you have come at the very nick of time,” was Miss Blount’s greeting, when, a week later, Ned called at her house. “ I want a man with a head on his shoulders. I have head enough of my own, if only a man would lend me his shoulders for a short time; but an old woman like me in a long silk dress, and rather nervous, is sadly troubled to fill a man’s place. You can really do me a great service, if you are inclined.”

She was watching him keenly out of her sharp steel-grey eyes, and her hand trifled with her snuff-box.

“ I shall be delighted to do anything I can for you,” he replied.

“ Not many words,” she said aloud. “ A good sign.”

And then she took a pinch of snuff, and sat silent, considering.

He was indeed altered, as Rose had told her; he was taller, bigger, but that was not the main alteration; there was a quiet firmness about his mouth—shaded, not overhung by the brown moustache, and a look of command in his dark blue eyes, which were new to Miss Blount, and his large nervous hand rested motionless on his knee.

“Very much altered indeed,” she said at last. “I thought you were a fool to go abroad, Edmund Barton, but the Almighty knew better. Have you had one or many fights with life abroad? You look like it, and as if you had won too. Men learn their grandest lessons of fortitude and self-denial in the struggles of life, and a prejudiced old woman would fain have them stay at home and keep jog-trot along the beaten track; and what sharp corners would be rubbed off then, what faults in the marble smoothed out? So short-sighted as we are, it is a mercy the Almighty keeps the government of our affairs in His hands. I thought you were a strapping young fellow, who could do a day’s hard work in the fields, and that you were not good for much else; but large and rough as

the block was, the grain was fine, and has taken shape and polish ; it is the fine hard marble that requires and bears the greatest amount of labour and skill in bringing it to perfection."

Could this be Miss Blount ? Ned was thinking.

"I never honestly liked your parents," she went on, after some minutes of silence, which she spent looking straight before her out of the window ; "don't be offended, I never did. Your father was a weak fool, who mismanaged his affairs and allowed himself to become a burden on his family and friends ; he was poor, and he was *not* proud ; and your mother—well, she was fool enough to marry Mark, and yet more a fool to love him faithfully as she does to this hour, never admitting his weakness, even to herself. I wrong her, God forgive me ; her devotion to him was beyond praise, her love for him redeemed all his weakness, and she was so proud that she never complained. She used to make me angry that she would not admit her poverty and misfortunes. She never asked me for anything ; but for his sake, and for her children's, she would accept what I offered her—she knew that I could [spare it, and that I

knew she needed it. I do admire her patience, her calm dignity, though I never could imitate her ; but I do not love her for them, and so I was not prepared to like you. How is it that you are so different from them both ? You are a better, a less selfish man than you used to be—are you not ?”

She turned from the window and watched him.

“ Oh ! Miss Blount, I hope so,” he said low and with bent head. “ May God bless you for your kindness to those who——”

“ Then you have heard that your foolish wrong has been righted—that the consequences of your hasty flight have been averted ?”

He bowed his head lower, but said nothing ; and she watched him a while, then she lifted her eyes, and with hands clasped in her lap, sat leaning forward, gazing earnestly at her father’s picture, as if she could take counsel there. As her features softened, her likeness to the picture increased.

“ I do not know what made me say that to you. I had not thought of it when you came in. Now I am glad I said it, because your

manner of receiving rebuke has strengthened my good opinion of you. I shall see soon whether you deserve it. I have been talking on like a garrulous old woman ; I will return to the subject with which I began. You can do me a service ; will you ? I have not a man to whom I can apply to render me any assistance in a difficulty (I mean a relative, of course) ; I can have hirelings, and plenty of legal advice. I daresay my brother-in-law, Mr. Lester, is a good lawyer, but I do not want a quibbler—all lawyers are that, more or less ; and my nephews are—one a lawyer again, and the other, by way of adding to the family incapacity, is a clergyman ! Highly useful all of them, I daresay, but not to me ; if there is one usually helpless and often mischievous human being it is a clergyman. John Lester, my favourite nephew, does not come and help me with the wharves and business ; he goes to college, and sticks a reverend before his name. And just now I want him.” There was a depth of irony and some sadness and disappointment in her tone. “I want him, but he is useless, and so I turn to you. I am going to trust you, Edmund Barton. Don’t interrupt

me, though you may think you have cause to be offended with my plain speech; you shall tell me what you have to say when I have done. You know Taylor, my manager? Some time ago he was ill; he is getting an old man, and I urged upon him to seek some one to share with and relieve him in his labours. He fought it off; he said he was not too ill to do his work; his clerk could write his letters, he still could find the necessary thought; it was more trouble to teach another than to do the work himself; it would be time enough to think of giving way when the difficulty arose; he was not older than myself. Had I been a man who from choice alone left the business to a manager, I could have taken it up myself, and superintended matters when it became necessary to change the manager; but, being a woman, it is impossible for me to do so, particularly being no longer a young woman. Twenty years ago I think I would have gone into the counting-house and the yards, and made blunders, and by my blunders taught myself all the details. It is a sore point with me that neither of my nephews is in the business, and I did not like

Taylor's naming it. I might sell the whole concern, only I do not like to sell; they can do what they please with it when I am dead. Poor Taylor was so frightened about my selling, and so anxious to have his own way, that he dragged himself about the Yards every day, brushed himself up, and looked ready to drop, but declared he was getting better. He did get better, but during this last fortnight he has had a worse fit, and some one ought to be in charge; a large order for timber has come in for the new houses near the railway-station, and more to be sent up to Altcaster. Taylor may be long ill, and I must act irrespectively of him, and on my own responsibility. If I get a new manager, I should like him to find everything in order, and I should like to have all the threads in my own hands, so that I may at least know whether he is honest or not. So at this moment I want a man who will be my representative, my mouthpiece, who will deal honourably with me, and tell me everything to the letter. Will you be that man? Can you command yourself so as to make others obey? Can you be faithful to me, although I am a



woman? Neither of my nephews is in the least fit for the office, and indeed neither of them would take it, so do not hesitate on that score."

"I can hardly think that my services can be of use," he began. "I know nothing——"

But she interrupted him. "That is for my consideration."

"There is one serious objection however," he said gravely. "I have just obtained a temporary appointment in the Post-office. I heard last night I am to join this week."

"Write and decline it; there are plenty of other people waiting eagerly to get such a thing; it will not go begging, and do you stay here with me." His hesitation and reserve made her the more anxious to secure him. "If you have no personal objection to my plan, there can be no difficulty in arranging the matter. Your mother, too, will be so glad to have you near her."

He looked up and smiled. "You plead well, Miss Blount; I will do what you wish, and serve you faithfully for as long as you may need me. My hesitation arose rather because my inclination was strong to stay."

"Go then at once; no, I will go with you. You must see if you can make shift with the cottage in the yard. I should like you to live there. Taylor's clerk is there now; if he is a nuisance to you he shall turn out. I will have anything done you want to make the place comfortable."

"It will be a great deal more comfortable than a 'humpy,' and even many a 'boss's' cottage."

The canal and wharves were a quarter of a mile from Miss Blount's house, but there was a shorter way across her fields, and this she took, "the paths were dry," as she explained to Edmund. She very seldom went down to the Yards, and it made quite a sensation amongst the workmen and their families, who lived on the premises, when she appeared.

Edmund had often as a lad gone to see Taylor the manager, had had many a ride on the timber loads in the barges, or in the manager's gig up to Altcaster market, for he was a favourite; he knew his way all over the Yards, had made a see-saw of the large planks, and played hide-and-seek in the saw-pits. He would

not hear of turning the clerk and his mother out of the cottage; the place was quite good enough for him, he said,—there were two clean rooms, a man could desire nothing more.

“You will come to-night—no—to-morrow,” Miss Blount said. “I will send the pony-chaise over for you and your portmanteau and your books. Rose says you have developed into a great reader. I have omitted saying, you must not work for nothing; you can do me an immense service, and the workman is worthy of his hire.”

Her plain face wore its most pleasant expression, her eyes were kind, her manner gracious and playful, and he suddenly understood how it was that Rose loved her.

“You must tell me what you were to have in the post-office for salary; it will be some guide to me. You said it was only a temporary appointment; it is true, then, as Rose told me, that you intend to return to Australia?”

“Certainly, as soon as I can get away. I was anxious to do something whilst I am at home, for many reasons; I may as well save all I can for my mother. I was to have thirty

shillings a week in the post-office, but for the short time you may want me it is hardly worth considering. I only want to keep myself; a pound a week would do it, if I live in the cottage. I shall be glad to take that, and perhaps you will feel better pleased that I should take something."

"I will give you the thirty shillings. I wish it,—don't refuse, I may give more, if you remain with me and I am satisfied with your behaviour," she said with an assumed primness of manner, and great deliberation.

When they reached the house, she led him through the hall and opened the garden door.

"Go and talk to Rose,—you will find her under the ash tree, and your sister Julia with her, I think. She leaves to-morrow, does she not? They will be glad of your company, and I am tired. Go and tell them how much I am obliged to you."

He lifted his hat to her, and brushed against the white jessamine that clustered round the door, bringing a cloud of sweet, starry white blossoms upon his head and shoulders. With his hat in his hand, and the sunlight playing on his hair,

he strolled down the path, and came to the two girls, who were lying on a rug spread on the grass, Rose reading aloud to Julia, who was working.

They looked up in surprise when Ned's tall shadow fell across them. Greeting them with a smile he sat down, and taking the book from where Rose had dropped it, he went on reading. He read with the ease and grace of a cultivated reader, full voiced, but not loud, with carefully husbanded breath, neither fast nor slow, phrasing and emphasizing correctly, missing no point of his author, and yet with no mannerism. Julia's work lay untouched in her lap, and Rose, with downcast eyes, listened with a new interest in the book. The colour came and went in her cheek. If he could read like that, he understood and appreciated the style and thoughts of the author. When he had arrived at the end of the essay he closed the book.

"It would be a pity to read more and spoil the completeness of Emerson's ideas. To read too much is as ineffective as (I should fancy) the seeing a great mass of pictures; they must surely spoil each other in tone, and colour, and in

variety of clashing ideas and subjects? I went but once to our picture-galleries, and I was only a stupid lad, and would rather have been playing cricket. Perhaps I should know better now. I cannot help thinking there is a great deal of fashion in one's likes and dislikes," he said, laughing. "Do not you think that most people are guided by what the world says of this or that, and that they are almost *afraid* of differing from received opinions? How many people have any real admiration for the old masters in painting?—and how many for Carlyle or Emerson as authors? And who really understands Shelley or Browning?"

"Why, Ned," cried Julia, "who has taken such pains with your education? How have you arrived at acquaintance with these authors? I knew you could read, but not as you did just now."

"I learned most of what I know in the Bush, I believe; my old master McLean was deeply read, like many of his nation."

"But was not this a quaint style for Rose to choose such a lovely day as this? I wanted some poetry, because Rose reads very well too,

but she was selfish (she often is, and so obstinate!), and would read what she wanted first. I do not mean that I dislike that long, grave essay, but we have got Tennyson's new book, 'Maud,' and 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' is with it, and I prefer them. May he read them, Rosie?"

"Oh! of course, if you like. I daresay they are much lighter, and, as you say, fitter for this breezy, sunshiny day."

Edmund took up the little crimson volume and read "The Charge of the Light Brigade" with kindling cheeks and flashing eyes, to those whose cheeks hung out the same sympathetic tokens, and whose eyes filled with proud, bright tears.

"I once thought of enlisting," he said, when he had finished. "I have some physical courage, I believe: and I used to think so big a fellow as myself ought to do something dashing—that was when I was in good spirits; when I was depressed I thought I might make food for powder, and save a better man. Now——"

He stopped short, feeling ashamed to be speaking thus about himself. Rose finished his sentence.

"—Now, you will do something worthy, no matter whether it is dashing or not."

"Do you then believe in me?" he said, low and thoughtfully.

"For this hour past," she answered, studying with great attention the regular flutings of a crimson dahlia she held.

Then he began to read "Maud," in his strong, finely modulated voice, read it from beginning to end without interruption, with the delicate perception of every beauty of thought and sentiment and versification. The three young people heard the poem for the first time—as all young people surely will ever do, passing over every irregularity, every blemish, and taking to themselves the pure sweet flower of a most perfect and passionate love.

"Come, June," Edmund said, after some little silence, when to each heart were recurring the passages that had pleased them most, and the melodious voice still seemed to be speaking, "we must go home—it is getting late."

"Can you not stay and drink tea?" pleaded Rose.

"No, I think it is better not. It is Julia's



last night at home ; my mother would like to have her."

"And to-morrow I go to Stonefield," said Rose.

"To-morrow! I thought you lived here," and the desirability of the cottage in the Yards did not seem so great to him.

"Oh no! I live with my brother John. Aunt Hannah asked me here now to come and meet Julia. But you will come to Stonefield to see John and me, will you not?"

"Perhaps. Oh yes! certainly,—I shall be very glad."

"You have told the girls, of course, of our arrangement," said Miss Blount when she wished the brother and sister good-bye.

"No, indeed," said he, "I have been reading:"

"What arrangement?" cried Rose and Julia in a breath.

"Edmund can tell you on your way home, Julia, and I will tell Rose."

Edmund kept repeating to himself the lines in the poem he had just read, beginning, "I have led her home, my love, my only friend," and still more earnestly, "There is none like her, none."

For the pronoun in the poetry his heart was substituting the noun, "Rose." When the quiet night came down, and he was alone, he knelt at his open window with folded arms; he looked out into the Summer darkness or laid his head upon his arms, and listened to his heart's secret—sometimes uttered in his own sighs, sometimes in the whisper of the leaves, sometimes seen in the twinkling of the stars, sometimes in the great white lilies down in the garden below. The object that he had kept shrined for all these years he desired to see again; on his knees like a devout worshipper he approached the sealed place, opened the long closed doors, and looked upon the smiling, serene face of Rose. "My love, my only friend!" he said; and there came upon him a great peace.

Heart-whole Julia was thinking of "birds in the high Hall garden," and remembering the way in which the thrushes had sung and called all day, and the nightingales all night, this very Summer in Hertfordshire. She recalled the tones of her brother's voice, and wondered what had given it that strange melody. Was she

right too?—had he lifted his eyes to Rose more than once, and was there a sweet trouble in Rose's face? She fell asleep, feeling sorry for Ned—for she fancied that Beauchamp Ashley had won Rose's affections.

And what of Rose herself? It was not only to-day that she had been struck with the sympathy between Edmund's character and views and her own. He had taken her by surprise at Lord Riverford's; she had talked with him since then, finding in him earnestness and thought; and to-day the grasp of intellect he displayed, the appreciation and comprehension of his reading of Emerson, presented him to her in a grander type,—the energy, mastery, and yet perfect simplicity of his character were peculiarly attractive to her. She had ceased to think of him as a big, heavy, good-natured, but rather weak young man: massive he was, but not heavy; strong and firm, like a chief corner-stone. To-day, too, she had seen the phase of feeling without which no character can be perfect. He had read "Maud" as none but a man who could love tenderly could read it; passages in it had gone straight from his heart to hers, and a thrill

passed through her when she remembered the accent in which he spoke, "There is none like her—none," and the liquid eyes that rested on her.

She would not, could not, dared not, think of all that this might mean; suddenly she remembered that to his question, "Do you believe in me?" she had answered Yes; and she had meant it too. She grew puzzled with her own thoughts, and fell asleep trying to find the clue. In her dreams she was wandering, wandering through great forests, not afraid, because she knew that she should hear the voice that by its call would guide her right; she would follow the voice, and when she reached it, a hand of welcome would be stretched out to her.

## CHAPTER V.

“SO that’s the little game,” Gilbert Drake continued to say over and over to himself. “There’s no spoiling it, of course,” he thought, for he did not put this in words. “I might only harm myself; but I have still a dart in store that will not make Master Ned’s heart the easier.”

Gilbert Drake had met Ned at last on the High Street. Drake had held out his hand, and Ned had not quite made up his mind to refuse it. He had not heard the evil story that the other had hinted about him, nor did he know that it was her master’s brutal words that had driven Ellen from her situation, and sent her for refuge to Miss Blount.

“You have kept very much at home, Mr. Barton,” Drake said, “since your return. Do

you play billiards now? We never see you, by any chance. There are a good many of your old comrades about, too; we should all be glad to see you again."

"I never play billiards now," Ned answered coldly; "it was a pity I ever did. But one has to learn one's experience, and I had a great deal of nonsense to be drummed out of me, I suppose. There is high play in the Bush sometimes, at cards, and very rough. I never joined in it."

Drake was not quite pleased with the young man's tone, or with his quiet eyes and firm mouth; but he began to talk of Australia, and to ask questions, as if interested in Ned's welfare. The evil smile was lurking about his mouth; but Ned had learned wariness; he soon observed it, and was wishing him good day, when Drake said quickly,

"By-the-by, I must thank you for the money; I got it all safe. It was very honourable of you to pay me, for I should not have been hard upon a youngster like you. A man cannot help bad luck, and you certainly had very bad luck; but you were improving—you would

have played well by now ; it is almost a pity you gave it up. Are you going to stay at home ? I heard you were going abroad again, but I hardly thought it was true."

"Quite true. I may remain in England a year, but six months is more likely."

"You'll stay at home, then, and do nothing for that time ?—or perhaps you are going back to the Brewery ?"

"No. I have looked about, and hope to hear of something to do soon. I don't want to be a burden on my mother, or stint her means."

This was all that had passed between them, but it was enough to put Edmund on his guard against the elder man. The expression of his face was bad, his tone when speaking of the returned money impertinent. Edmund wondered that, in spite of a certain physical beauty, anyone should think Gilbert Drake handsome ; and he resolved carefully to avoid speaking to him for the future. He met him several times, but only wished him good day and passed on.

Gilbert Drake was not pleased, as bad men never are pleased when they see moral growth

in others. He was a clever man, and saw plainly the alteration in the lad he had found pliable and weak. The moral and intellectual growth were as markedly developed as the personal appearance was changed. The kind eyes had become earnest, the sensitive mouth firm, the brows massive and thoughtful, the chin more strongly marked, the head more erect; the whole carriage and bearing of the man was changed, and no one saw this more distinctly than Gilbert Drake. He knew, too, that he had meant to ruin him, and had not succeeded, and this knowledge made him sore and angry and dangerous. He had felt and feared the powerful arm of the youth, and he feared now still more the cold glance and the resolute will of the man.

In a country town common talk and public gossip are busy, and within a very few days after Miss Blount had asked Edmund Barton to superintend the yards for her, the affair was discussed at the "Lion," and Edmund's good fortune commented upon, for the most part with a friendly feeling. But Drake was terribly annoyed. He did not say so; he laughed with



others at "the whim of the old lady" in selecting a man who knew nothing of business to look after so large a concern. Twenty other "far more eligible persons" were named as fitted for the post, but "if Miss Blount preferred Barton, it was no business of theirs."

Drake was surprised at himself for feeling so annoyed; he had not been used to render any account to his own conscience, or what served instead of one, and he could not see directly what caused his vexation. But as he turned the news he had heard over in his mind, gradually his hazy notions took form, and he pictured to himself Ned constantly in Riverford, Ned spoken to; and trusted by this man and that, Ned, Miss Blount's adviser—Ned, in short, in power, and holding influence. This had annoyed him! He could not bear to see him in honour! And the worst of Drake's hatred was that it did not strike so much at Edmund as at another person through him. He went on weaving possibilities and torturing himself. Ned, perhaps, might not go to Australia at all. He might become manager of Miss Blount's property; he might marry Rose Lester! He

struck his hand against his thigh as he walked down the street to his house.

"So that's their little game!" he exclaimed, as he let himself into his house. Finding the servants gone to bed, he betook himself to the kitchen, raked the dying embers together, and made some strong brandy and water, which he drank slowly while he smoked. He never got drunk; it did not suit him or his views in any way; but sometimes, and to-night he did so, he drank till he was angry and dangerous. The servants shrank away from him next morning, as they had often done when Ellen Ward had lived there; and all day long he muttered, or said aloud, with varied gesticulations, "That's their little game!" When his old cook came to ask his orders before she went to bed, and to lock the windows and doors, he detained her by asking,

"Can you tell me what became of that good-for-nothing girl,—Ellen Ward, I think her name was,—I mean the girl who ran away from here?"

"Lord, sir! it's such a long time ago, I've most forgot her. No, I don't call to mind any-

thing about her." She stood still, biting the corner of her apron, as if thinking intently, and watched his lowering face. He could not mean well, it was not in him; and she had been with him long enough to know his humours; she would tell him nothing, and he could not make her do so. "Leastways, I can't think of nothing about her—unless, maybe, you was to ask Miss Blount."

She had a dart too.

"Miss Blount!" he echoed; "what could Miss Blount have to do with my servants?"

"Only, sir, that most of them that's sick and sorry hereabouts find their way to her, and she helps them."

"Good Lord! then all I can say," and he spoke slowly, and with sneering lips, "is that she must have a rare lot of scamps to deal with; particularly if this girl is a specimen."

"She was a very good girl, sir, as you and I know well; a hard-working girl, and a kind girl. She never give me nor you an answer, and I never had to tell her a thing twice. But you was hard on her, because she was good and gentle."

"Go away! How dare you be standing there and upholding such a hussy as that? You ought to be ashamed! At your age, too! But perhaps it is your very age that makes you forget what is decent behaviour; and, maybe, you would have been as bad yourself," he said, with a fierce, bitter laugh.

"Maybe I am old," the woman said, as she closed the door behind her, "but not too old to know that she was good, and only foolish, poor child! It seems to me I've been always old; If I'd had a sweetheart—— Ah, well! I've not told him one word, nor I don't mean to, and let him go to Miss Blount if he dare! But I wonder what he's up to now? He's nasty, I can see."

He certainly was "nasty," and horribly out of temper. He had done his best to hurt and annoy Rose before, and he thought he had succeeded in separating her and Beauchamp Ashley, but he was not so sure of it in these last few weeks, for Rose was looking calm, and not unhappy, and Ashley had returned from his exile in Somerset, and was "hanging about," as Drake said, looking ill and gloomy. Was

everything going against him? and would this woman, who had so coolly and proudly scorned him, add a second lover to the first? Was there no such thing as revenge? for revenge was very sweet. Several times he had thought over his unreasonable, ridiculous (he called it so) dislike, and, for a while, it slept; and then, perhaps, Rose Lester would ride past, bow her head slightly to his salute, and he would look at her graceful seat, her perfect hand, her clear-cut face, and her firm, peaceful mouth, and all his hatred awoke once more. He admired her so much, and was angry with himself for doing so; and he was bitterly chagrined that she never vouchsafed him more than the coldest recognition.

Edmund Barton lived on quietly in the cottage, mastering the details of the business, and coming every evening to talk over matters with Miss Blount, who looked forward with pleasure to his visit; it gave her a new interest in life, and she felt, as she looked up at her father's picture at night, when she was putting away her books and papers, that he must be satisfied with her stewardship. The question about Wood Cot-

tage was settled; Edmund thought the rent was absurdly low, but Lord Riverford took pains to show him that the house had been long untenanted before his father had taken it, that Mr. Barton had done a good deal to it, and that it was not one likely to suit many people, and Ned was forced to give way. The Earl declined to buy "The Warrens," and induced Ned to give up the idea of selling it, telling him he would again consider the purchasing of the property if Ned should go out to Australia at the end of a year with no intention of returning. He did not argue, but represented matters to him from what he called his "own business point of view;" and Ned, whose object was to do what would best provide for his mother, and who was unversed in the management of property, listened. He allowed himself to be convinced. Lady Riverford declared Edmund, after the first time he had lunched at the Hall, to be the most charming young man she had ever met.

"I make the distinction of *young man*," she said, "because I think a thoroughly charming man improves as he grows older, and I believe this man will do so. But he has perfect man-

ners, like his mother ; he is so unaffected that it never occurs to him that I am Lady Riverford—he would behave just as well to the gardener's wife. He is sterling coin, and bears a bright impression too. I do not know if he is handsome or not, he is so to me, and as Saul was chosen king out of the tribes of Israel, this man would have been chosen, in olden days, the king, the *Caning* or capable man, the ruler. Lord Riverford is very quick to know the persons I like ; he was not mistaken in this case."

Lord Riverford acknowledged his wife's praise by taking her beautiful white hand in his and bowing over it ; theirs was a true and perfect symyathy, that had increased with years.

"Here is this man," went on Lady Riverford, "working for our good friend Miss Blount, and looking cheerful and well, and Beauchamp Ashley mopes about looking wretched. I cannot imagine what has happened to Beauchamp. Have you asked him here lately ?—though I do not know if it is much use ; he goes off to Somerset at a moment's notice, and just as one fancies he has arrived at Broadstone."

The Earl had suspicions of his own, which he

did not impart to any one; a great many rumours on a great many subjects constantly reached him; he heard, and smiled, and drew his own conclusions, but he never spoke of such things unless when Lady Riverford pressed him very hard with an impetuous and totally contrary conclusion to his own.

Calling one afternoon on Miss Blount, about a little vagabond in whom they were both interested, Lady Riverford found Edmund Barton there, writing letters. When her mission was ended the Countess asked him to walk into the town with her to meet her carriage, which was waiting for her.

"So you are really at work, comfortable, and understood here?" she said as soon as they had passed the gates.

"Yes, I am perfectly satisfied; but time is hurrying on, it will soon be Christmas, and I promised to remain with Miss Blount six months; she has given no sign of being aware of this herself. Taylor, her manager, does not get better."

"Show me where you live."

To the great surprise of Miss Blount,



who was watching them from behind the lace curtains, they took the pathway to the Yards.

They went into the cottage parlour, with its gaily-flowered paper, horsehair sofa, and one leather easy-chair. The table was littered with books and papers, and in a vase were some China roses.

"And you live here," she said. "It is not lively, nor is there any view except of the wharf, and those bare trees beyond. What do you do? Not always keep accounts, I suppose? What are you reading?" She took up a magazine, the paper of the day, turned over half-a-dozen works on commercial subjects. "Learning your duties thoroughly, I see," she said, looking at him with fresh interest; "you have no belief in royal roads and short cuts. Study, learn, seems to be your creed, and just a little play intermixed," touching the Cornhill and Fraser. "But what are these dainty volumes? Shelley—Tennyson? Ah! I see, 'In Memoriam' and 'Maud.' Do you like them?"

"More than I once thought possible. 'In Memoriam,' the sad, mournful cry of the heart, as some say; the sentimental drivel, according

to others, is to me a confession of faith and of purest philosophy, as expressed by a deeply affectionate heart. Shelley, I am *learning*, like my ideas of Commerce; and 'Maud' is the sweetest love-song, clothed in glowing imagery."

"Pretty well for a learner; the language not ill-chosen, and rather effective," laughed Lady Riverford. "Your lessons are various, and your instructors are——" She paused, and pointed to the name written on the title-page of both of Tennyson's poems. "Rose Lester. Does Miss Lester lend you books?"

"Yes; she lent me both of those. I was over at Stonefield Vicarage lately, and asked her for them."

"And does the Shelley belong to her, also?"

"No; the Shelley is mine."

"H'm! And how do you know Miss Lester so well? Do you meet her often at her Aunt's? I fancy the old lady is very fond of her."

"I have met her there, and at my mother's; she and my eldest sister are friends. There is a very old friendship between her mother and

mine; it is much stronger than between Miss Blount and my mother. Her grandfather knew mine, too, very well."

"Just so; very nicely explained. And so you sit here, and read, and spend your evenings alone, and dream. Do you dream?" she asked, looking at the roses on the chimney-piece as he fancied.

"Will you not sit down?" he said, drawing a chair near to the fire.

"Thanks! but you have not answered my question. Do you dream here? Don't dream; it is not good for you." He still fancied she had some reason for looking at the China roses. "And did the roses come from the Vicarage too? I thought so," she said, with a smile. "Once more, I recommend you not to dream, unless you can make dreams realities."

"Would you please to take some tea, Mr. Barton?" asked the clerk's mother, who was housekeeper, looking into the parlour; then, seeing the Countess, "Will my lady take some, too?"

"I should like some very much, and then I can sit here a little longer," said Lady River-

ford, leaning back in her chair, and unfastening her heavy velvet cloak.

When the tea was brought, she sat leisurely sipping it, and looking at the fire.

“So you are content here. I wonder what has made you so different from most men of your age? The first day you came to see me, you were neither glad nor sorry. Do not defend yourself; I daresay you were glad before you went away. I have reason to think so, because you have been to see me again. You did not appear shy, but at your ease, and perfectly equal-minded, if I may use such a term. Your life abroad——”

“My life abroad! Shall I tell you what it was like? The first two years, I lived, messed in rough, coarse,—if not actually dirty,—often uncomfortable, ill-kept huts, with common, illiterate, coarse-minded men, four of us stockmen, in one hut, with a hut-keeper, working hard, bodily, manual toil. After that, I was an overseer on the same station, with a kind, honourable, educated Scot, though rough in appearance. Then I was at the diggings with a gentleman refined in manners, roughing it

amongst the savages of civilization, the scum, the off-scouring of the overcrowded pot of society. Such a life as mine has taught me at least fortitude and firmness; and by showing me evil in many, and some of its worst forms, has made me desire to avoid it. You spoke of my coming to see you. I cannot tell you how much I have felt and valued your asking me to your house, but—it may sound very presumptuous—I was not the least overcome with awe or shyness. There is only one set of people with whom I own I am sometimes uncomfortable, and at a loss what to say and do—people that think much of themselves, that are self-asserting, that are nothing, know nothing, mere commonplace, half-informed—impositions. I am quite at my ease with that bargeman outside, and his wife and children—he is an honest man; but with low, vulgar impostors I have nothing in common. They generally detest me, by-the-by; and when I was a lad, before I left home, it was with them that I associated, and I could never understand why they always made me hate myself and them, and left me in a state of untold depression,

mistrust, and hopelessness. I have come out of it all now, whether by having fathomed them, or better learned myself, I cannot say."

"The result has been satisfactory, at least," said Lady Riverford; "surely you are a very fortunate man now to have the society of three such women as Miss Blount, your mother, and myself? A man is not worth much without women's society and influence, and I will never admit that women, certain women, are inferior to men; that old farce has gone on long enough. You will see that the re-action will come. I, for one, say I do not know my superior, and I am inclined to think Hannah Blount would say the same; your mother would not, but I say it for her. We other two are not her equals in moral rectitude and fortitude, though Hannah Blount may be more energetic and a fine woman of business, and I more intellectual; but it is in the emotional and moral qualities that women excel, and they are therefore more devoted and more devotional. You know, I suppose, why women are so inferior to men? Because we do not begin to be, to do, to think, to act, to reason, to fight as

soon as they do ; the difference is not congenital, whatever men, as representing brute force, and the desire to have and hold the supremacy, may say, but one of education, of received opinion. Bring us all up alike from birth, the intellectual difference would, I am convinced, be that between individuals. I am not going now into the desirability of confounding the line of demarcation between the avocations of men and women. However, to return to you, I am rather sorry you should be compelled to take an inferior position like this. You might have had some Government, some fitter appointment."

"I do not think so. I have no private interest, and how would it be better or fitter? I am not fitted for much myself. Besides, this is only temporary."

"Ah, yes—you intend to return to Australia. Some of us will miss you. Pardon me, but had you formed any attachment there?"

"Yes, I thought I had found a woman worthy of all love."

"And you are anxious to return to her?"

"She is married now ; she did not find me worth loving."

"She taught you much, then—self-knowledge, self-reliance. Do not neglect the bitter lesson. But I must be driving home; my horses and servants will be weary of delay. You will walk into the town with me? I shall often think of you here by the cottage fire, and you will come and see me soon. And don't dream, Mr. Barton," she said, bending from her carriage, and giving him her hand as she drove away.

Edmund returned to his quiet room, to find it the brighter for her late presence, and himself more considered for having entertained the Countess of Riverford for an hour. She had not observed it, but he knew that, during her visit, many of the workmen in the Yards and their children had been about the cottage, to know if it were true that Lady Riverford was there, and as she passed through the gates she was watched with the greatest interest. There is an immense amount of hero-worship in the world; it would be well if all heroes deserved the worship as much as did Lady Riverford.



## CHAPTER VI.

EDMUND next day reminded Miss Blount that five months of the promised six were already passed, and that it would be a satisfaction if she would tell him what arrangements she had made for the future—if she had heard of a suitable manager.

“I thought you were comfortable here,” she answered with a sharp look. “I have not found another manager; what is the use of worrying about it? Are you so anxious to return to your wilderness? You have pretty good society here, at any rate.”

This was said with a little sneer, and Ned knew it was referring to Lady Riverford’s long visit.

“Could you not make this employment suit you until I find some one to suit *me*? Tay-

lor may get well, and the six months are not over."

Miss Blount was getting irritable.

"I saw Taylor yesterday—poor fellow! He cannot hold a pen. He was good enough to say he was glad I was in charge."

"And I saw him too, and know as much about him as you do."

Miss Blount might have said she knew a little more, for Taylor, who had always liked Ned, told her she could not do better than keep the young man altogether.

"The only thing that is necessary," Ned began, again returning to the charge, "is that I should know what you wish me to do. I owe some consideration to my old employer in Australia. He gave me a year to be away, and I must write to him."

"Well, write and say that I want you for the present, and don't let me hear any more about the matter," said Miss Blount, with much asperity, and, pulling out a blotting-book, began to write a letter.

Ned laughed, and resolved that he would act on his own responsibility, and not con-

sult her. When he wanted to go he would go.

She finished her letter, and asked Edmund to drive over to Stonefield with her in the afternoon, inquired about his mother, said she had a parcel to send to his sister Julia, unlocked a narrow cupboard in her book-case, and took out a pretty silk dress, which she began to wrap in paper and string, taken from another shelf in the same receptacle; but Ned begged her to let him pack it; and so deftly did he manage it that she clapped her hands, saying,

“I like a handy man. Now direct it—good, large writing, black, so that there can be no mistake. Take that away with you, and send it before you go home. I knew you were a good carpenter—James showed me Turk’s kennel the other day, but I did not know a great awkward fellow like you could do small tidy things.”

Ned laughed; Miss Blount was plain-spoken, but yet complimentary, and he had learned in the Bush, as he said, to take things as they came. But the “great, awkward fellow” brought a paper-cutter, of mother-of-pearl, shaped like a scimitar, and cut in delicate tracery, that he had

amused himself with executing on his voyage home, and a screen he had made from the gaudy, strangely contrasted plumage of Australian birds. He presented them to Miss Blount, who graciously accepted them, and valued them more than the piece of auriferous quartz which he had given her on his first visit, and which stood on her drawing-room table, under a little glass shade.

As Edmund walked across the fields into the town with his sister's parcel, he met Miss Lester and Beauchamp Ashley. They were talking, she looked calm and bright, but he looked cold and gloomy; his expression became more gloomy when he recognised Ned, and when he saw the colour flush Rose's cheek, and the smile come to her lips. She stepped a pace in advance, and would have shaken hands with Ned, but he only lifted his hat and passed on.

"I thought," said Beauchamp, "that Mr. Barton was to return to Australia?"

"So he says," replied Rose; "but I sincerely hope he will not go. What would Aunt Hannah do without him now. Between you and me, she thinks of keeping him altogether, and

making him manager ; it would surely be better than going to the colonies ! He would have a good salary, and not be separated from his family. He has made two or three valuable friends here, I understand."

"Whether it would be better for him to go or stay, is a question I cannot enter upon ; it depends so much upon a man's views and intentions. I should not have supposed Mr. Barton's family connections were so many or so influential as to——" there he stopped, for he encountered a look from her of pained, unfeigned surprise ; "but perhaps you are better informed—more interested—or——" and once more he stopped ; he was becoming angry and ironical ; it was imprudent, impertinent.

"I do not think, Mr. Ashley, you are either informed or interested in Mr. Barton's affairs ; we will not discuss them. If he and my aunt are satisfied with each other, that is the great matter."

Rose spoke firmly, and looked him bravely in the face, though she knew the colour had risen in her cheek. With a great gentleness, and dislike of giving others pain, she was yet

thoroughly persuaded in her own mind, and courageously maintained her opinions.

Beauchamp went into Miss Blount's house with Rose, and, in the old lady's straightforward and genial society, recovered his composure. When he took leave, he said he would seek John Lester in the town, and return with him to Stonefield. The Vicar had driven his sister over to see her aunt. On the way they had met Mr. Ashley, and he had accepted a seat in the dog-cart (not very well knowing what to do with himself, weary of the house, and weary of his books). Beauchamp wandered into the town, forgot what he came for, got tired of waiting for Mr. Lester, and walked home alone, moodily.

As Edmund Barton despatched his parcel, he thought how the gloom on Ashley's face only made the brightness upon Rose's more patent. She was glad to see him, but, clearly, Ashley was jealous-tempered, and could not bear preference to be shown to any other man. Well, he had no right to complain; and then suddenly darted into his mind, with the rapidity and illumination of lightning, Lady Riverford's warning.

"This is why," he thought, "she bid me beware of dreaming."

By the light and pain of the cruel flash, he knew that in his heart Rose reigned as Queen. More than once during the Winter he found himself walking or riding on one side of Rose Lester, with Beauchamp Ashley on the other. They were usually silent when this occurred, but the townspeople and the villagers talked about them all, and wondered what would be the upshot, and which of "her admirers" Miss Lester was likely to choose.

Christmas came, and Rose was hostess again at Stonefield Vicarage. She was very happy; walking with her father, and driving her mother out, finishing the practice of her choir in a new anthem for Christmas-eve and Christmas-day, visiting down at the almshouses, and amongst the poor pensioners.

"Rose, you will be quite worn out," her mother said,—the day after Christmas, when Rose gave her servants a feast,—though happy in watching her daughter's activity, and seeing that Stonefield had brought a cure to her tired and wounded heart; "do not overtire yourself,

love; you promised to drive me over to High-beeches to-morrow, and I may wish to stay, if Maria presses me."

"I shall be delighted to go, dear mother. I mean to have a quiet week before the Hunt ball; but it never tires me out to go to Mrs. Barton's."

Somehow, Edmund was at home with his mother that evening, and Rose sang sweet old songs. She was happy, and laughed. Edith said she had never seen her so gay, and, for the moment, Edmund forgot Lady Riverford's warning, and was happy too; talking of the grand forests, the rivers, the mountains of Australia, till Rose said he made her wish she could have seen them. With lowered voice, he told her how often, in the long, lonely nights, he had recalled her image: telling her his trust in her had been the turning-point of his life. Rose listened gravely, but her eyes fell under his earnest glance, and he drew back, afraid she might think him presumptuous. Yet it was the happiest evening they had ever spent together, and each was convinced that, come what might, there was, at least, one who would



understand, one who would sympathise, one whose eyes would brighten at their coming.

Edmund drove home as far as Riverford with the Lesters; he had resolved on the way to ask Rose a question.

"You were saying just now that you would much like to see Australia; do you think an educated woman, a lady,—I do not know what better word to use,—could pass a tolerably happy life there?"

"Certainly I do," she said. "Why not?"

"You know I have an idea of taking my sisters out; my dear mother, for many natural reasons, does not at all wish to go, but they—do you think a woman could be happy there? that she would go willingly?"

"I can only say," Rose answered rapidly, but low and with hurried breath, "that I would willingly go anywhere with the man I loved."

"Thank you very much for so direct a reply. Now I shall wish you good night—the rest of your way is quite plain."

He shook hands hastily; Rose had scarcely time to draw the pony up when he had sprung out of the carriage, and waving his hat, had

turned his face away from them, and his shadow was lying black upon the long white road.

"If I could only dare to think, if I might dare to ask her," his thoughts ran on. "She is disturbed sometimes, but happy with me; and yet how is it possible for me to imagine that she could ever care for me? I must not let myself dwell on the idea; such a conceited fool! Besides, there was Lady Riverford's warning: yet it is a blessing to know that she exists, and to think of her. I will go back to McLean as soon as I can manage it, and forget—if I can—if I can."

Edmund had an interview with Mr. Taylor the next day, which modified his views.

"I doubt if I shall ever be able to return to my post," the old gentleman said, "though I continue to hold out hopes of it to Miss Blount; she thinks no one understands the business but me, because her father selected me for manager. She feels a certain amount of confidence in you because you consult me. I wish I could persuade you to remain with her altogether, I am sure I could obtain the situation for you, if you like it."

"I should not like it at all unless she herself asked me; and even then I am not sure that I should be wise in accepting it."

"I cannot but wish you might find it suit you to remain. You might choose an English wife, and then you would prefer to stay in England; she would, at any rate."

"I shall probably never marry," Ned answered gravely. "I must consider my mother and sisters' convenience first."

"That is very well in theory, but—if you fell in love would you be justified in putting it in practice? I hardly think so."

"Then I must not fall in love," said Ned, still more gravely.

This conversation prepared Edmund for the possibility of a longer sojourn in England. At the new year he had letters from McLean and Dawson. Farming was going on well, the sheep and cattle on the increase, his own stock was multiplying fast, and Harry took a pleasure in enumerating them and their peculiarities; he wrote too of the men, the horses, the dogs; poor Laddie was getting old and blind: of Christina, who never ceased to lament Ned,

and to draw unfavourable comparisons between him and Harry; and McLean wrote that Dawson was going on well, liked his work, and was a great help to him, though not like his "dear boy," and yet he bid him stay in England as long as he was wanted, and as he himself wished to stay.

When next Miss Blount pressed Edmund not to hurry his departure, he promised to remain until the Spring. Rose looked pleased when he told her this the day before the Hunt ball, and she said that both her brother and herself felt greatly indebted to him.

"You know it is a sore subject with Auntie that neither of my brothers thought the business 'good enough' for them, and she will not give it up as long as she lives: she once tried to make me promise to carry it on after her death. But you see you came in time to smooth all the difficulties, and in the most unexpected fashion."

"It could not have well been more unexpected to me," he said laughing. "I wonder at myself every time I mount the high stool in the office, and open the big desk, I ought to

have a pair of round silver rimmed spectacles."

"How I should like to see you!" cried Rose.

"Pray come; any day before one o'clock you may find me in that exalted situation—barring the spectacles. You are going to the ball, of course, to-morrow? With Lady Riverford?"

"Yes, she is good enough to chaperon me. My brother John thinks a clergyman is better away from these gaieties. I have never been to a ball in the town-hall; Lady Riverford goes very seldom, having no daughters; but this year people made rather a point of her going, so she promised to do so, and has been asking guests from London to be of her party—several young ladies, and three gentlemen. Your friend Captain Forteith is one; you will be glad of that."

"I! I do not think that I shall go to the ball. What should I do there?—surely it would seem absurd in me to go."

"I do not see why; the question simply is—would you like it yourself? But I thought you had promised Lady Riverford; she would feel hurt if you stayed away. You must go. Do go."

She had never shown so much interest in him before; he looked earnestly at her, to read, if possible, her inmost heart; and then, dreading she should think his scrutiny impertinent, he smiled and said,

“If my presence can give you the smallest pleasure, I will go.”

“I wish you would come as far as Marsh’s with me,” she said, a little nervously; he thought in his modesty she only wanted to restore him to his good opinion. “Auntie has sent me to order myself a bouquet for to-morrow. I assure you the details of my toilette have been most entrancing to her for a week past.”

“And to you? I have not seen you for a week.”

“Oh! no; I went home with mamma. I do not spend much time on toilette questions. I know what I like and what I want, and the choice is soon made. It must be a great trouble, though, where means are not sufficient to meet requirements—not that ball dresses are requirements. Society, so called, is a great bore to me; one hardly ever meets anyone really pleasant.”

"I fear you would laugh at me, were I to tell you my particular sensation amongst other people. I do not mean people one knows and likes—Lady Riverford, Forteith, for instance. But you know I have dined out here and at Altcaster, with people who knew my father and mother in former days. I do not feel awkward; I don't spill the wine or upset the chairs; but I feel so big!—as if I wanted room to breathe, room to stretch out my arms, and the ceiling is too near my head. It sounds very ridiculous. The opinion I have come to is that the rest of the company do not suit me."

"I like the idea, and have *felt* the same thing, though I have never found the words to express it; but I must plead guilty to having felt the converse of that—so very small!—like a neglected bird moping on its bough alone."

In Marsh's shop stood an elegantly-dressed woman, who turned round on Rose's entrance, and then came forward and shook hands with her. The Honourable Mrs. Vesey, once Maud Ashley.

"Oh! Miss Lester! are you staying here? I am so glad! It is so deadly lively at Broad-

stone, I do not know what to do with myself. Papa made a great point of my going to this Hunt ball to-morrow, so I was obliged to come down for a few days. Papa is very little at the Park now, as I daresay you know; but Beauchamp has been there some time, living like a hermit, as he always does. Between you and me, papa is not pleased at the way Beauchamp is behaving to——”

“Hush!” interrupted Rose, glancing at Marsh and his shopman, and at Edmund Barton, who stood by the door of the shop; “some one will hear you; you are speaking louder than you think.”

“I mean Gertrude,” whispered Mrs. Vesey, with a look of some admiration at Edmund. “Mamma wished him to marry her, and he promised her and papa that he would—and he really asked her once, but she did not think he was in earnest, and so he has not attempted to fulfil his promise yet. But she is come down with me now, so perhaps——Come and see us, and we can talk. Come to luncheon to-morrow before the ball. Beauchamp told me you are going with Lady Riverford. Come to-



morrow. Gertrude will be delighted, though you have no idea how dull it is. Mr. Vesey comes down to-morrow—not that that will make it much better.”

Rose promised to go, though she could not help laughing at the wording of the invitation. Maud wanted some one to enliven her.

“Who is that fine-looking man with you?—not your other brother?” Mrs. Vesey asked in a rather loud whisper, just as she was leaving the shop.

“He is a Mr. Barton,” answered Rose; then, turning to him, she said, “Will you attend Mrs. Vesey to her carriage?”

Mrs. Vesey addressed some words to him as she crossed the pavement, gave him a smile, and the tips of her gloved fingers, as she stepped into the carriage; then, as he stood with his hat in his hand intending to withdraw, she had another and yet another smiling remark to make, all of which he answered gravely; and when the eager horses, having refused the start once or twice, at last whirled her on her way home, he returned to Rose’s side, who asked him, laughing, if he had felt “very big” in Mrs.

Vesey's society. He answered with something between a frown and a smile,

"No, I was realizing your idea of the lonely little bird, rather frightened of all the tumult and glitter—so many traps to catch the unwary; but I should not have been caught or fascinated. I should have flown away. I am a bird of the wilderness, and must be free."

## CHAPTER VII.

EVERYONE said the town-hall had never looked so gay, had never been so well lighted or so beautifully decorated, as on that January night. There was a great contrast between the brilliant rooms and the snow that had fallen without, blown up by a bitter easterly wind all the previous day. Lady Riverford was old-fashioned, and she gathered her party together at an earlier dinner hour than usual. They were rather brilliant in apparel, for Lord Riverford wore his Lord-Lieutenant's uniform, and all the gentlemen, except Edmund, wore either naval or military uniforms. There were three young ladies besides Rose, and Lady Riverford would have added a fifth to the number, for she had asked Mrs. Barton to allow her to take Edith, and to give her her dress and ornaments; but Mrs. Barton, pleased as she was,

declined the proffered amusement for her child. It was an unnecessary excitement, she said, and would not add to her happiness, for it was one that could never be indulged. Lady Riverford did not press the matter, for she respected Mrs. Barton's good sense.

The band of the —th, from Altcaster, were occupying the orchestra, a crowd of officers were standing in the door-way, and the stewards, with a blue and silver badge in their button-holes, were busily ushering in new arrivals, arranging dances, and making introductions, when Lady Riverford and her train entered the ball-room. A quadrille was just concluding, and before Rose Lester was seated she was claimed for the new dance.

"That is such a lovely waltz of Lanner's; do give it me, Miss Lester," asked Captain For-teith. "I am not the youngest and handsomest of partners, but you shall not find fault with my pace. I promise to guide you safely, and I will not over-tire you for other people."

The rooms filled fast, the waltz was a long one, and before it was over the party from Broadstone had arrived. Rose was hanging on

Captain Forteith's arm, smiling as she talked to him, and presently he bore her through the tumult of the dance.

Beauchamp Ashley soon singled out her figure, clothed in a sweeping white silk dress, covered with delicate lace flounces, her abundant brown hair rolled from the brow was gathered low on the neck, in the fashion of that day, and woven into a coronet, in which she wore a spray of white rosebuds, that was fastened back into the roll of hair at the back of her head. She danced so easily and gracefully that it was a pleasure to watch her, as Gertrude Brabazon said—pale, delicate Gertrude, who did not dance, and who only came to the ball because Mr. Ashley wished it. Beauchamp Ashley leaned over the back of her chair, and listened to her affectionate praise of Rose, but she could not see his face. On a sudden he was absorbed with the jealous idea that Forteith was the man she preferred, and he watched the two with a deepening frown. Mrs. Vesey, in the meantime, had renewed her slight acquaintance of the previous day with Edmund Barton, and was endeavouring to draw him into conversation, and

to keep him employed in little services about her ; but he, whilst submitting to all her whimsical caprices, yielded no jot of his stateliness, and lost no point of the brilliant scene before him, none at least in which Rose was engaged.

Captain Forteith detained Rose for a second dance, and she was engaged to other gentlemen of her party, but when she returned to her seat and was talking to Miss Brabazon, Beauchamp Ashley came forward.

“ If I may dare to separate such sweet friends, you will dance with me, Miss Lester ? ” he said with a smile on his pale face and a constrained look, like a man acting from strong purpose. He drew her hand through his arm and led her away to the quadrille, placing her with his back to their companions. He meant to talk to her without observation, but he could only address common-place sentences to her, till the end of the dance, when he said,

“ You were at the Park at luncheon to-day. Why was I not told ? It is an odd thing that I should have lived like an owl for weeks, months, and no one cared how. On a sudden the one person I wish to see comes there, and

I, the recluse, am left in my study, alone, as usual. When Miss Brabazon told me, as we were driving here to-night, I had to smile and say 'Really,' and look as if I did not care. Not care! I could have killed Maud!—it must have been her doing."

"Hush!" said Rose, "do not speak so angrily; people will think you are quarrelling with me." She spoke with a smile, but there was a tear in her eye, and when she looked up at his grieved, angry face, her heart ached for him. "I knew nothing about it," she said softly; "only I was sorry not to see you. But never mind—try not to mind. It cannot matter any more—it must not."

"No, nothing matters any more—not for me. Everything has gone wrong; nothing matters any more." His tone was low and fierce.

The band began to play the introduction to Gung'l's "Dreams on the Ocean," and Beauchamp made the tour of the room slowly, with Rose; then he passed his arm about her waist, and led the dance for two or three turns alone. He held her close to him; if they rested a moment he scarcely loosed his hold, and

when he led her back he looked at her intently, saying,

"I shall never dance again ; all these things are ended."

Mrs. Vesey had been dancing, but she returned also to her place, and began again to laugh with Edmund Barton.

"Is there no one you care to dance with, Mr. Barton ? With such music, how can you help it ? I would dance with you, if you would ask me." And she looked up from under her lashes.

"I have not the slightest idea of dancing. I am not sure that a man ought to dance unless he can dance as beautifully as Mr. Ashley does. His waltz with Miss Lester was perfect—they floated."

"Yes, was it not delightful to watch them ?" said Miss Brabazon. "We were praising your dancing, Rose," she said, affectionately, as Rose sat down beside her.

Rose only smiled ; she was uneasy and grieved.

"I am not a dancer, Miss Lester, but you will let me take you to the buffet for some ice. Are



you tired? You have no idea how well they have decorated the refreshment-room. I took Lady Riverford there."

Edmund offered his arm, and Rose got up.

"May I go too?" pleaded Gertrude—"will you take me? I do not dance, but I shall like a turn round the pretty rooms."

So the three went together; Mrs. Vesey frowned and bit her lip, and Mr. Vesey, who came up stroking his long fair moustaches, laughed and said,

"I hoped, my dear, you were enjoying your flirtation. Who is the *beau géant* so distinguished by you to-night? You have not yet danced with him; are you reserving the favour to enhance its value?"

"Pray don't be absurd; the giant does not dance."

"Indeed!—*tant pis pour lui!* There are some pretty women here to-night, and some can dance. I want to get a waltz with Miss Lester, whom your brother so greatly admires."

"Beauchamp will hear you," she said, colouring and glancing round.

"Other people admire the young lady besides

him, your *beau géant* amongst the number, if I am not mistaken."

"I cannot have the pleasure of dancing with you," Edmund Barton was saying, "but will you let me take you in to supper? Shall we go into the gallery and look at the pictures presently? They are all portraits, of course, but some of them are good, of East Anglian worthies."

Captain Forteith asked Rose for another dance, but she said she was tired—she should dance no more.

Mrs. Vesey was still dancing when supper was announced, and from various corners of the room she had observed with great annoyance the expression of her brother's face. He had thrown himself into a chair against the wall when he had finished dancing with Miss Lester; there he had remained, speaking to no one; with his elbow on the arm of the chair, and his head on his hand, he observed everything that went on, his countenance becoming more gloomy when Miss Lester left the room with Mr. Barton; then he watched the doorway anxiously for her return.

Maud hurried forward, leaving her partner's arm, to take her crimson cloak from the back of her chair; bending down to her brother, she said, in low, quick sentences,

"Beauchamp! what are you about? The eyes of half the room are on you! Sitting glowering there because a lady likes other people as well as you. Do you want all the town to talk of you to-morrow?"

"The town may say what it will. *You* need say nothing."

"Good heavens! I must speak to you. Come and take Gertrude in to supper; she looks so pained at your manner, she cannot help observing it. Have you no pride left? That girl could have been nothing to you."

"Say would not—not could not. Make no mistakes about it, Maud. I asked her, and she refused me; are you satisfied? It is perfectly true, and, amongst you, you have destroyed me, fool that I was to let you! Oh! I am coming."

And, pushing his sister on one side, he stooped, and asked Gertrude to go with him, careful-

ly shawled her, and led her away, leaving Mrs. Vesey in a state of dumb surprise, with throbbing pulses and flushed cheeks.)

"I am so sorry you are tired," her partner said, "we kept up the gallop too long."

"Perhaps," she said, absently.

Then she recollected herself, and talked and laughed with great animation. Finding herself near to Edmund in the supper-room, she began a bantering conversation with him, which he ended abruptly with a grave rejoinder.

"The *beau géant* is *un peu méchant*, eh, *n'est-ce pas, ma chère?*" laughed Mr. Vesey over his wife's shoulder.

Mrs. Vesey frowned, and bit her lips.

The supper was handsome, and the champagne flowed freely. Certainly the whole entertainment did great credit to the gentlemen of the Hunt. But that it was not enjoyed by all the guests, and that there was some bitterness of feeling, some heart-burning, cannot be honestly laid to the charge of the hosts.

The weather was cold and stormy, and the roads were blocked with snow, which fell heavily the night of the ball.

At Broadstone Park, the day after the ball, before noon, and before Mrs. Vesey had left her room, where she was sitting grumbling at the weather, with her maid brushing her hair, Gertrude Brabazon came knocking for admittance. She was quite dressed, even to her bonnet and veil, and ready to go out. Mrs. Vesey exclaimed at sight of her, but Gertrude said,

"Do you mean to go to London to-day, Maud, or not? I believe we can perfectly well go to the station. If Mr. Ashley's horses cannot go, let us send a boy over to Riverford for a fly. I wish to go to-day, whatever you may do. The sooner I can go, the better; some of your servants can find a boy to bring a fly for me, I daresay."

"But you cannot go alone!" cried Maud, breathless with surprise; it was something quite new for Gertrude to assert herself.

"Yes; but I do not wish to do so. One of the men or women servants would surely ac-

company me. The only difficulty will be to reach the station."

"I had better send for Beauchamp; he will go with you, of course."

And she rose to ring for the maid who had left them alone.

"Pray don't ring. I had rather he did not go. You are not coming yourself, then, to-day?"

"My dear, do look at the weather, and I am not nearly ready. I should like to have gone, but I do not see how I can."

Maud was moving about helplessly, looking for sleeves, and collar, and handkerchief. Gertrude stood still at the window, looking out at the rapidly falling snow.

"There is no time to be lost," she said, turning round. "I am going to ring. Do you please tell your maid to send for a fly, and desire some one to get ready to go with me."

Maud did as she was asked, in a hurried, confused way; and in a short time the vehicle was announced, and the youngest footman was waiting at the door, in great-coat and muffler. Mr. Vesey came sauntering along the gallery

from the dining-room, where he had breakfasted alone, and had been reading the morning papers.

"Will you go to town with Miss Brabazon?" Mrs. Vesey said, calling him into her room.

"I shall be delighted to go to-morrow. I am tired of Broadstone already; but to-day—oh! Miss Brabazon! have a little pity on human nature. Look at the weather! *Regardez mes pantoufles! Regardez un peu mes papillotes!*" touching his bright curly hair as he spoke. "I have not yet lunched. *Que voulez-vous? Que faire?*" and he shrugged his shoulders, and smiled lazily.

"I did not ask you to go," said Gertrude in a low voice, "you are only delaying me. I am quite ready. Good-bye, Maud."

"By my halidom!" ejaculated Mr. Vesey, and rushed into his dressing-room, from whence he issued, as Miss Brabazon descended the stairs, coated and booted for the journey. He only stopped an instant and nodded to his wife, who was standing at the top of the stairs in great perturbation.

"What will Beauchamp say?" she had just

exclaimed to Gertrude. "What is the matter with you, Gertrude?" she had lifted her veil and looked into her pale face.

"Nothing is the matter," she answered quietly, though her hands were clenched nervously, "only I wish to go home. I might have to stay here for a week with this heavy snow, and I can go now."

"You have been crying! Beauchamp will say—he will be so hurt and annoyed."

"Your brother can say what he pleases; you need not say it for him. If he ever have anything to say to me, he must come and say it. I was wrong to let you bring me here to him."

Then she went quietly down the stairs without another word, without a sign of trouble, save her extreme pallor, and the darkness under her large eyes. Mr. Vesey followed her, handed her into the carriage, and went with her to London. She never spoke to him till she reached her father's door, then she stretched out her hand.

"Thank you for coming. I have been a very stupid companion; I was very tired, I believe."

In a few days the snow ceased to fall, a hard



frost set in, and people were free to move about.

Mr. Ashley and his daughter went up to London, and the Park was left to its former silence. It was said that Mr. Beauchamp Ashley had gone to Somersetshire, but lights were burning every night in the rooms devoted to his use.

It was reported that Mr. Ashley had expressed great annoyance with his son, that he had been heard to say he was a mere idler and a continual source of disappointment to him, and that in some recent matter he had displeased him. So the gossips, putting their wits to work, had concluded that the young squire was unwilling to please his father in some matrimonial scheme, and desired to please himself. Then the ball was discussed; people found it very natural that Miss Lester should have shown a little kindness to her old friend, and rather hard that Mr. Beauchamp Ashley should have been offended with her for it. But, said one, there was surely some talk of his being engaged to Miss Brabazon? Dear me! said another, it is not likely, she is very rich certainly, but she is crooked, and he so evidently prefers Miss Lester. Is Miss Lester quite his equal in position?

suggested a third, who must have heard the point mooted from the servants' hall at the Park. Perhaps not, said a fourth, but what does that matter if they love each other? And, said the fifth, the wife takes the husband's rank. But, said one again, it was said there was an old family engagement. Ah! said five, six, seven, and eight, that would alter the case materially.

Doubtless these worthy people were well informed, but they had not taken into account the views of the gentleman and lady themselves.

## CHAPTER VIII.

“SO you were at the ball, I see, last week, Mr. Barton,” said Gilbert Drake, looking up from the local weekly paper that he held as Edmund entered the reading-room. “It must have been very gay.”

“It was indeed; not that I dance,” and he sat down in a corner and took up the journal he had come in to peruse.

There were several other people present, it being market day, and the town unusually full, and Gilbert Drake considered himself snubbed, which he accordingly resented, and determined to repay. The silence in the room was complete when Drake spoke in clear tones, again addressing Edmund.

“The ladies’ dresses are described at great length, I see; there must have been some very

pretty women there. I saw most of the carriages drive up. I thought one lady in particular exquisitely dressed; she is very pretty at night, though hitherto I should have sworn she looked better on horseback than anywhere; but I heard," he said carelessly, looking intently at the sole of his left boot, which he had crossed over his knee, "that Miss Lester really looked very lovely. What a loss it must have been for you not to dance with her. Of course she would have danced with so old a friend and admirer as you are, in spite of young Mr. Ashley's superior attractions. That marriage with the heiress—I forget her name—is off, of course. I always thought Miss Lester would be the winning horse."

Edmund sprang to his feet with flashing eyes at the first mention of Rose's name, and by the time the sentence was finished, he had laid his strong hand on Drake's collar.

"Do you know where you are, sir, and of whom you are speaking?" he cried, in a voice that made every man in the room look up. "If you dare mention that lady's name again, I will give you the best thrashing ever man had!"

For a moment Drake quailed, but his bitter

anger overcame his fear of chastisement and his usual prudent behaviour.

"You constitute yourself the lady's champion," he hissed; "you might have waited till you were asked; she would hardly thank you. Why, the whole town knows that the heiress went away the day after the ball because of Mr. Ashley's conduct. The donkey that he was, between the two bundles of hay! However, he has chosen at last. They say that his father will not leave him a shilling; he will have nothing but his own little place in the west of England. And you fancied she had a sneaking kindness for you! She's been dilly-dallying some years about it, I confess—ever since you were a boy; when she paid your debts for you," (the man's lips were white, and he spoke between his clenched, strong white teeth)—"but, of course, any one with half an eye knew that Beauchamp Ashley was Miss Lester's fancy man."

"I fancied nothing," shouted Ned, "but that she was one of God's angels, you unutterable scoundrel! Never you dare to show your wicked face before gentlemen again!"

He had no stick with him, but he seized one (it belonged to the Rector of Riverford, who was present) that was standing in the rack close by him, and broke it in pieces across Drake's shoulders; then he took him by the elbows, pushed him before him out of the room, along the passage, and kicked him into the street. Drake never said a word, but turned deadly white, and foam gathered about his mouth, as on the jaws of a wild animal; then he lay sprawling in the street, in the snow half melted by the trampling of many feet, stared at, but unpitied, by the passers-by; for he was a hard man to everyone, and had a bitter tongue and a cruel laugh, and now the laugh was against him. Then he picked himself up and went home by the back street, his heart full of curses.

The whole scene took so few minutes in its transaction, that the gentlemen who were present had only just risen to interfere, when the matter was summarily ended by the expulsion of the offender. Edmund Barton shook himself together, and straightened his coat and waistcoat in the passage, and then re-entered

the reading-room, his face calm, though flushed, the anger extinguished in his eyes, and no trace of the struggle left upon him, save the ruffled state of his thick brown hair. He had still a portion of the broken stick in his hand.

"I am very sorry, gentlemen," he began, "if I have offended against your rules, or your ideas of propriety. I am sorry for any breach of etiquette I may have committed, but not in the least sorry for the chastisement I have inflicted on that ruffian. I would do it again were you to expel me hence also." [A murmur, hardly distinct and intelligible, went round the circle, most of the members of which knew Barton only by sight and name; the Rector had picked up, and was examining, the pieces of his broken stick, and, lifting his eyes, he looked over the rim of his gold-mounted spectacles rather ruefully at the speaker]. "I am sorry, too," Edmund went on, observing and understanding the expression of the Rector's face, "that I should have broken that handsome stick of yours, Mr. Merivale, over such a fellow; a stake out of the hedge would have fitted him

better, but—the moment called for action, and my only idea was summary justice.”

He had never spoken to Mr. Merivale before, who was a new-comer during Ned's absence in Australia, and who, being a man of family, and having pretensions to considerable church preferment, had kept himself aloof from most of his neighbours; but through all his study and pursuit of what was most desirable and most conducive to his interest, he had preserved his heart-core sound. He had sons at Eton and at Cambridge; he liked to see their prowess on the cricket-field and on the river—to know that they were brave, fearless men, and to hope that they would ever defend the right; he had himself been, in his youth, distinguished for personal courage and field sports, and now his heart spoke out from under the crust of custom and good society. His brow cleared, and he went up to Edmund.

“I did not know you, Mr. Barton, nor do I exactly understand this matter, but you appear to me to have chastised the insolence of a man who dared to speak of a lady of your acquaintance very grossly in public. I am happy to



meet you here, and, if you want a friend, you may depend upon my good offices."

Again a murmur went through the room, this time of unmixed congratulation, and Ned found himself suddenly in favour.

"Drake will call you out, Mr Barton," laughed a captain of Yeomanry, who lived in Riverford; "if he does, and I can be of any use to you, call upon me. I was going to say, if you are not a very first-rate shot, he is big enough to present a fine mark; but, by Jove! as to inches you are much on a par."

"Good shot!" whispered the senior clerk in Mr. Charles Barton's brewery; "young Barton has been in the Bush. Winged everything."

"Oh, ay! I forgot that. But he is a nasty-tempered fellow, Drake; as civil as can be, too civil, when you have found out he has a temper. He will be a good riddance. He's dangerous."

"By-the-by," said Mr. Merivale, "how did he get here? I, of course, considering my cloth, ought not to be exclusive, but really one ought to know a little with whom one associates."

"Can you call it associating?" asked Dr. Brenchley; "in a town like this, all the respect-

able tradespeople like to read in this room, to meet each other, and to meet their Rector maybe," with a little bow to the reverend gentleman; "and, if they are fortunate, to exchange a few sentences with him, and fancy they have gathered his opinions; one can hardly keep them out, I think. We should be the ones to stay away if there be any change made—we who have rooms and libraries of our own at home."

"I am afraid," said Edmund, "it is the brawlers such as I who disturb the peace, and break the sticks of other people, who ought to be tabooed from admittance here. If you think I ought to be expelled, I will bear the punishment silently."

"Not at all! Not at all!" was the buzz of rejoinder.

"You see," said Dr. Brenchley, addressing himself chiefly to the Rector, "the Drakes are very old inhabitants, and have been a respectable and respected family for a long time. This man Gilbert Drake bears a very good character, and is quite an authority in his particular line."

"He forgot himself, however, egregiously to—

day," answered the Rector; "a gentleman cannot sit still and hear a lady's name bandied about. I must say I hope he will never be allowed to enter these doors again; there are certain things about which one should make a stand."

"He shall not come in as long as I am here to keep him out," said Ned impetuously. "I could tell you that about the man that would convince you, one and all, that I have done a good day's work in thrashing him. But I prefer to be silent."

"Be perfectly sure he won't want to come if he knows you are to the fore, Barton," said the Captain. "I never saw a man look so crushed in all my life, or in such a ghastly funk."

"Or so dangerous," said Mr. Piggott the lawyer, who was sitting quietly in the corner, and had not yet spoken. "You may be sure, Mr. Barton, you will hear of that man again. I do not suppose he will try force of fist against you, but he will try force of law. He will want to bring an action against you, I am certain (I know him very well too), and will probably consult me before night."

All eyes were turned upon the speaker in a cold, questioning manner, and in some latent fear of the man of law. He was a reserved, sarcastic man, and his fellow-townsmen held him a little in awe, for he seemed ever to be recording silent judgment against them. But Ned was not afraid.

"If he consults you, may I ask what will be your answer?" he asked, with hair tossed back and bright eyes, as if he were ready once more to go into the fray. "One likes to be forewarned—at least I do, it means for me forearmed; and when I strike, I prefer to strike home and let the blow be telling. One learns self-defence, at least, in the Bush. May I ask what will be your answer?"

"Nay," replied Mr Piggott, with his ironical smile, "as I may be consulted by you both, it would be unfair to give you now any such answer. Judgment reserved, as we say." Then he bowed to the assemblage and left the room.

"You have evidently not gone the *legal* way to work, Mr. Barton," said the Rector. "If you have nothing better to do, come and dine with

and dine with you to-night. I know how valuable are friends to a young man, and I cannot but be grateful to you for your sympathy, and for thus showing your confidence in me."

"I meant it so. I am glad you understand me," said the Rector, shaking hands more warmly than his wont with the young man, whose earnest eyes and face had stirred the eager chivalry of his own real nature, which he only concealed from long habit with a coating of reserve.

Edmund turned away to trudge across the slushy fields alone to the Yards. The excitement was over; his face grew pale and stern, and his head drooped forward; he walked slowly and wearily, not with his accustomed rapid springy step. After all, the pain of Drake's words remained behind; part of what he said might be true, and in that case he was a greater sufferer than Drake, for all his bruises and aching bones. He could no longer conceal from himself that life without this woman must be tasteless, colourless—that she alone could round it into a perfect whole. But what was he that he should dare to tell her this? It

seemed to him a weak boyish fancy to lay his heart as an offering at her feet, standing by humbly to see if she would deign to take it up, or even to see it. He could live for her, die for her, in a manly, fearless fashion, and go to meet life or death with head erect and smiling lips; he did not doubt she had noble soul enough to bless him, even if she loved him not; but to stand aside lovelorn and sighing was not in his character. Once or twice, in spite of the modesty and self-distrust that were natural to him, the thought would obtrude itself—Could it be possible that he should so entirely and devotedly love her without her having any preference for him? Love, to be perfect, must be mutual, must be equal—there is no better nor best.

A few months ago, when he had first recognised all the beauty and sympathy of her soul, and had yielded himself up to her influence, he had been contented to dream of her, to watch her from a distance, to feel happy in her presence, and was glad to think even of her existence, and a great peace had come to him. Peace and

rest make the soul strong—strong to endure, strong to suffer, strong to labour and strive; for not in this world is it given to man to remain for ever at rest. Rest is but a transient state; strife is the normal condition. All the peace that Edmund had felt was gone; he would rest no more; his heart had spoken out. If he must exist alone, unmated, then at least it must not be here—to live in sight of and shut out from Paradise were double hell. Let him go back to his wilderness, and not mock himself with false surroundings; there let him toil on, waiting as patiently as he might for the end of his appointed task, and praying for trust in the Creator who had so tried him, and for the righting in another state of the apparent wrong in this.

He went into the office, where he found people waiting to speak to him, and letters requiring answers. He went through his duties mechanically, conscious of throbbing temples, and thankful when the short daylight closed, and the importunate clients ceased to call, and the workmen went home, closing the Yard gates; there was at least silence, but he had to dine at the Rectory. Not yet could he sit down and

think, and the one thing for which his soul now craved was time to think.

He kept his engagement at the Rectory, because his native dignity and self-respect required it ; but no sooner was he alone in the cold and under the stars than he tried in vain to recall the events of the evening ; they were utterly forgotten ; the one subject of his pre-occupation re-asserted its sway, and thicker and faster came his thoughts trooping on. His cottage walls seemed to press upon and be ready to crush him. He could not breathe ; he flung open his windows—was he going mad ?—and had he allowed this passion to twine itself about his being, growing so silently and insidiously that only with life could it be rooted out ? If there were something possible to him to do, that he might yield up his last breath for her, so that she might know all his love, and bless him as he died !

The night wore itself through as he lay restless and wakeful on his bed ; the morning came, and he rose and donned the best armour he could find to meet the struggle of the day. In this way many days passed by, and still



he had not fully mastered all his thoughts, and his heart would not be hushed or pacified, but continued to cry out to him.

The canals, blocked up with ice for some time, were freed, and barges that had been delayed, both at Altcaster and Riverford, were coming in for stores or going out laden. Life would not be denied, its necessities clamoured for satisfaction, the tale of bricks must be made up, the work-a-day world was beating at his doors, and sad, sick at heart, despairing, he must work its will late and early. "Ye be idle," would have been all its answer to any sad or fierce complaint of his against its iron hand of exaction, or to any prayer for respite of time against its hurrying foot.

It took all Edmund's courage and strong will to enable him to fulfil his onerous duties. So much engaged was he that he could not find time to see Lady Riverford before she went up to town, and he was obliged to refuse an invitation to visit Captain Forteith.

He had met Rose once or twice, but always with others, and he was constrained in her presence; his love for her oppressed him, and he

could not find any relief in commonplace talk, though he could sit silent, and in her presence take some comfort. She thought him cold, wondered if he wearied of his promise to her aunt, and were anxious to return to Australia; sometimes, with a blush, she feared she had been too hasty in supposing she could make any difference in his happiness—and yet she did suppose it, so much finer were her instincts than his.

During this time Gilbert Drake had, as Mr. Piggott had foretold he would do, consulted him as to what redress the law would give him for the indignity and assault he had suffered from Mr. Barton. Very angry and very vindictive he was, unable to speak without a threat of his assailant, and it required much time and patience before the lawyer could make him see that there might be cases in which summary punishment was justifiable. He talked a great deal of nonsense about the majesty of the law and the liberty of the subject, and Mr. Piggott yawned and laughed in his sleeve, but charged his fee for conference; then, having let him talk in hope of exhausting some of his rancour, he

one day told him that of course he could bring an action against Mr. Barton for assault, but that, having taken full note of all the circumstances, and regard being had to Mr. Barton's justly aroused anger, he really could not *advise* such a proceeding—the feeling of gentlemen would be very strong, and he thought he would infallibly be cast in costs; on the whole, he would seriously recommend him to make as light of the affair as possible;—he felt sure Mr. Barton would not be induced to apologise,—and to—in short, to pocket the affront.

Gilbert Drake blustered in vain after Mr. Pig-gott had thus distinctly expressed himself. The lawyer quietly altered the crossing of his legs, and took a penknife from the table, with which he coolly and carefully nibbed a pen, and said nothing at all; and finally Mr. Drake, bursting with indignation, but finding his solicitor deaf and unsympathetic, departed. He bethought him at first of engaging the services of another attorney, but he was in such bad repute, so uniformly snubbed, that Drake was wise enough to see that, if a cause were advocated by such a man, it was tantamount to damning it altogether. He continued to threaten and bluster

to the few people who troubled themselves to attend to his remarks, but fortunately for himself, and for Rose, whom he might have continued at least to annoy,—to be hidden in the tabernacle from the strife of tongues was by the Psalmist a promised blessing—a Riverford tradesman decamped at this juncture deeply indebted to Drake, amongst other creditors, and his brother recommended him to take advantage of the excuse of being severely bit and remove to London.

Drake was not sorry to go, for the terms of respect in which he heard Edmund Barton mentioned, the consideration with which he knew he was treated (the fact of his leaving the reading-room on the Rector's arm, and dining that night at the Rectory, was duly reported to him), were wormwood to him, and he knew that he was utterly worsted—that all his evil machinations were vain, and that he had only injured himself by his gross endeavours to injure Rose, and those whom he had encouraged in weakness and folly.

A queer, garbled account of the chastisement inflicted by Edmund upon Drake got into circulation, and was variously received and com-

mented upon by Edmund's acquaintances; but when any remark was made to him, he looked grave, and turned the conversation. Nothing but righteous wrath would have induced him to lay his powerful hands upon the man. Miss Blount tried to learn the story from him, but he firmly declined to tell her, and she looked with increased favour upon the man who protected what he believed to be just by his own fists. Most true women do so favour the protector, and this is the attraction of the military for the fair sex. It is not the scarlet and gold, nor the jaunty air, nor the fine horsemanship, nor the glitter and show that surround a soldier that attract her, but that the position affords him more opportunities for discovering cool bravery, personal courage, calm endurance, self-denial, and acts of true nobility, than a civilian's life does. The man is proven, he illustrates his professions. How often men forget to put in practice Browning's fine criticism :

"But you have to deal with woman-kind ?

Abandon stratagem for strategy ! . . . . .  
 . . . . . stand forth all man, and might it chance  
 Somewhat of angel too ! Whate'er inheritance  
 Actual on earth, in heaven prospective, be your boast,  
 Lay claim to ! Your best self revealed at uttermost."

The only person who had a tolerably accurate report of Drake's discomfiture was Lady Riverford. Her maid, Clark, was intimate with Miss Drake, and from her she learnt the whole of the story, as told by Drake, coupled with a strong expression that he had used more than once in his sister's presence, of bitter dislike of Miss Lester; of how he hated her proud, haughty ways, and would fain strike her cold, handsome face, and how he would like to see the tears of shame and annoyance fill her eyes. Miss Drake was shocked, having seen a good deal of Miss Lester from her childhood, and having always found her agreeable, and having, indeed, been indebted to her for many kindnesses.

Lady Riverford listened with a changing face, and all through Clark's tale she was recalling a number of circumstances that she had seen, but not fully understood, at the time.

"Poor Rose!—poor Miss Lester! What can she have been about to rouse such a man's hatred? One can hardly understand how, but I can only suppose he was too familiar one day, and Miss Lester taught him his place and snubbed him. What do you think of the affair,

Clark?" asked Lady Riverford, facing round upon her maid,—“what do you think of Mr. Barton's behaviour?"

“La! my lady, I declare I think it was grand!—I do, indeed. It is not always that a man takes the trouble to protect a woman. I do like him for it—that I do, and I wish she may hear of it, and fall in love with him.”

“Oh! that is your notion? It would just happen so in one of those delightful yellow railway novels you are so fond of—would it not? The print is so bad I cannot read them. I cannot understand how a person can read when he is travelling.”

“My lady's eyesight is not so good as mine,” said Clark to herself; and then she said, aloud: “But it would be so nice—so romantic, you know, my lady.”

“Go away to bed, you silly woman! What a fool I was to ask any opinion of yours!”

“That's just the worst of my lady,” said Mrs. Clark to herself, outside in the gallery; “she asks one, and then laughs at what one says; I am such a fool, I always think she's in earnest this time, and I speak quite true to

her. But for all she laughed at me just now, she's as pleased with Mr. Barton as I am. She'll write him a letter to-morrow, as sure as sure; and she was pleased with him from the first time she saw him, so I don't think I am more of a fool than she is."

Clark was right, and Lady Riverford wrote to Edmund next day, asking him to come and see her at the Hall before she went to London. People sometimes affected to speak of Lady Riverford as capricious; she certainly took her own way, acted as seemed best to her, and made her friends where she pleased; but having once secured her for a friend, she was staunch and unwavering. Lord Riverford often said she was the most uncompromising person of his acquaintance—severe upon herself as well as upon others, and unflinching in the performance of duty at whatever cost, looking with scorn and surprise upon waverers; a thoroughly high and noble-hearted woman, and doubtless he knew better than most people; yet she was woman enough to be annoyed when Edmund replied that it was impossible he could come over to see her, much as he wished to do so. She was



snappish to Clark and difficult to please, and at last confessed to that faithful cushion, into which she stuck all her pins of dislike, vexation, weariness, and boredom, that she was provoked.

“I wanted to have heard all the story, Clark, and from himself; he would have told me, and I had several reasons for wishing to know, precisely.”

Clark smiled, and thought her lady was not so very different from other people, after all. It was only her reading of the old adage, of the hero and the *valet-de-chambre*.

## CHAPTER IX.

EDMUND rarely left the Yards except for his regular consultation with Miss Blount; he had thrown into his daily occupations some of that dogged energy and fierce courage of despair that he had shown in the fields of Mount Alexander. He was striving to still his heart with incessant toil, to drown its voice with increasing occupation. Was there any unusual writing or accounts to be completed he took more than his share, doing the work of the two clerks out of hours. Was there heavy timber to be loaded, or any difficulty in the choice or management of conveyance or of horses, he lent his strength, his courage, his keen eye, his governing hand. Unruly beasts and men submitted to the force they perceived in him, though it was only drawn out by emergency.

He read, for further taming of himself, books of higher scope, requiring more thought and study than he had hitherto done. All the time he knew the unrest within him, and that the cry of his soul was never hushed, only drowned, as the beating of Eastern tom-toms conceals the cries of victims. He was not singular; from many another soul comes the same cry, but the means taken to drown it is not the same; for the most part the tom-tom of idle, dissolute pleasure is employed, or the more certainly and irreparably destructive, though apparently less objectionable, tom-tom of worldly society.

Sometimes, as to other souls in torture, there came to him the desire of human sympathy. There was but one man to whom he could unbosom himself, McLean; to go to him would mean leaving all that had become as the breath of life here. No, he must stand alone, fight alone, conquer alone, as every good man and true has done before, to win his rank of hero. More weary than usual one night, thinking he would go away at once, and not stay even to complete his term with Miss Blount, saying that no one

could help or care for him but McLean, his heart itself turned round upon him. "Blind and infatuated," it seemed to say, "no one but McLean! Is there not herself? or rather is there anyone but her? To whom should you go, of whom ask, but her? Unfit for her, unequal to her, presumptuous to approach her! for all that, go to her; to no one but her. She only holds joy and rest in her hands; take from her lips alone the answer to the riddle of your life."

Nerved with new energy, strong with a new courage, he went over to Miss Blount's. It was late, but she would see him.

"I have not seen you for some days," she said. "I want to talk to you particularly; but first, what had you to say?"

"Nothing very especial. I was alone, and too tired to read."

"Will you have some coffee, or some wine? both are ready. I am alone too. Rose has been with me, but she is gone to London."

"Gone to London to-day," he said, stirring his coffee, and taking his resolution at once, for his purpose was strengthened by the opposition;

"that was rather my errand. Can I do anything for you in London? I want to go, and see Captain Forteith, of whom you have heard me speak. I could get away for a day or two?"

"Of course you can go when you think proper—you are not so tied here as that. You have been working as if the business was your own, Edmund, and you wanted to learn all the ins and outs."

She eyed him closely as she spoke, but his own thoughts were far away, and his object in hard work was not what she suggested.

"I observe you never take hints," she said again, bridling a little.

"Do I not? I am afraid I am too matter-of-fact, and only understand plain speaking," he answered smiling.

"It may be so; you are not less in my eyes on that account."

She looked up inquiringly, trustfully, at her father's picture.

"He only understood plain-speaking, and so listen: I have seen Taylor to-day. I believe he will never return to his management. He has not recovered the full use of his hand. He

trails his right leg, he told me. I ought not to keep the place open for him any longer. I suppose I must get a new manager; his advice should be good—he advises me to keep *you*, if I can. What do you say? Will you give up Australia and remain with me? Could you like it? I will give you the salary Mr. Taylor has had. You can live where you like, and will be pretty much your own master. If I were to talk of it for an hour, I could not express myself more plainly.”

Edmund sat silent. What might this mean?

“Was Mr. Lester here yesterday?” he said, slowly, in the deliberate tones of a man who is mentally weighing an important matter. “Did you happen to mention this?—and if so, what, may I ask, was his opinion?”

“You quite forget, it seems to me,” she said, with the impetuosity of a woman who knows the full value of power, and declines in any way to part with it, “that this business is my property, and that I can do as I please with it. My brother-in-law’s sons, himself, and his family generally,”—this was said with some bitterness —“have never cared for the business. My

sister was induced to sell her share of it, and it was not distinguished enough for any of them, so their opinion is not to be asked, is it? I should have fancied the only person concerned was myself. But perhaps I am wrong."

"Perfectly right in one sense, but you may easily see, Miss Blount, that, if they objected to me, they might make my life disagreeable, and I should be unable to do you justice if I could not go on quietly myself."

"I believe you are right on that score; but as it seems to be a gratification to you to know that they do not object, both John and Rose expressed their hope that you would listen to my proposals, and were pleased that I should make them."

"They wished it?" he said, following out his own train of thought. "Will you give me a week to think over it? There is one great consideration involved, but within a week that might be arranged. I am greatly surprised, and I feel the honour you are doing me more than I can express."

"As to the honour—no matter. I shall not supply your place to my liking. Go and have a

talk to Taylor, and we will speak again of it in a week."

He went back to his cottage, in a raging wind that bowed the great bare trees, and roared through their branches; he lifted his face to the black angry sky, through the rifts of whose hurrying clouds a star showed itself now and then for a moment.

"I went to hear of her," he thought—"to find her, and she is gone! Another quest, and I *will* find her. I am only the more steadfastly purposed now to learn from her all my fate. I am so little worthy; I have nothing I can bring her in my hand, nothing I can do for her—no devotion, no sign of prowess I can show her. The days of giants and enchanters are over. I have no knightly deed to lay at her feet, no pilgrim's staff from Palestine, no prayers and blessing of the poor. But one thing is mine, and that I offer her—myself, my life-long devotion."

The raging wind soothed him, and the hurrying clouds were in sympathy with his exalted mood. He had turned away from the Yards, and was walking, deeply immersed in thought,



driven by the easterly wind, along a cross-road behind the town of Riverford.

Surely there was an unusual light in the sky ! Northern lights !—oh ! no ; this shining was low on the horizon, down in a westerly direction. The light seemed to spring up again. He passed his hand across his brow and eyes.

"It is fire," he said aloud, "fire ! but where ? God ! at Stonefield ! Her home ! Yes, Stonefield lies there !"

He pressed his hat closer on his brows, sprang out of the road and across the fields that led to Riverford ; roused up the fire-men with few short words, "Fire ! fire ! Stonefield way. Hurry ! Fire !" rushed into the Lion yard, and awoke an ostler.

"Is the old chestnut in I used to ride ?" he cried ; "fling a saddle-cloth across her, any bridle will serve me. There is fire at Stonefield, Dick. I'll not forget you."

He spoke to the mare as he vaulted on to her back ; she pricked her ears to his voice, and in two minutes he was straining across country. He knew every by-way, every foot of vantage, and the mare, like a wise beast as she was,

trusted to his guidance in such a steeple-chase as she had never run before, just as he trusted her to land him safe over hedge and ditch.

The fire was beyond Stonefield. When he got there the village lay still and dark, every one was asleep, but the fire was near him; he could see it much clearer now, though a wood occupied the rising ground and the valley between him, and——Broadstone, ah! he knew now, Broadstone Park was on fire! He looked up at the windows of Stonefield Rectory. In one there was a light. Was it possible she was at home? In that case should he alarm her? The man whom he was told she preferred might be in that burning house; should he, ought he to terrify her? He shouted "Fire!" as he tore through the sleeping village, a face looked out from the lighted window at the Rectory, and he heard in other houses a cry that answered to his shout.

Yes, Broadstone Park was on fire. He galloped up the avenue unchallenged at the lodge-gate, whose occupants had gone up to the house in a vain hope of helping some one. He opened the stable gates; there was a large open shed; he

flung the reins on the mare's neck, stroked her reeking flanks as he leaped down ; left her to shift for herself, and then sprang into the house. He found himself in the midst of a number of terrified people, none of whom knew what to do. "Is there no one here to take command?" he cried; "the house will be burned to the ground; the fire gains!"

"Young Mr. Ashley is at home; his rooms are at the other end of the house; he was asleep, and they had to wake him. He is with the men in the gallery, the women-servants sleep up above. There are few servants kept now, and only two men in the stables; we sent the children from the lodge to the farms to awaken them, but it is so dark. We have sent a man on horseback to Riverford for the engines."

"He'll meet them coming, then, for I told them half an hour ago. They will be here directly."

As Ned spoke there was heard a rush of hurrying feet; people came down the broad staircase carrying pictures and other valuables from above, and presently a voice cried, "If there is a man amongst you that dares, let him go into the back premises, and set up here

against the gallery window a ladder and ropes; the staircase has fallen in, and there is a room above with people suffocating. The fire gains upon us."

Edmund called out two men after him, who were willing enough to help if anyone would lead, and for a good leader they would even brave danger. The house was in darkness, save for the changeful light given by jets of flame. By the aid of a stable lantern they found ropes and a ladder. Rapidly the ladder was planted; when Ned had wound the ropes about his body, he sprang up the rungs like a cat, and leaped in at the gallery window. Beauchamp Ashley met him there, and the two men, with pale faces in the glare that shone upon them fitfully, with eager eyes and lips apart, through which came hurrying breath, stood there together—two men who disliked and had avoided each other.

"Mr. Barton!" said Ashley, in low hoarse tones, "is it you?"

"Yes, I. I saw the fire from the fields behind Riverford, called out the engines, they will be here soon, and hurried forward."

One long look into each other's face; there

was a convulsion of each throat, a frown of suppressed feeling on each brow, the hurried breathing was calmed, and quiet resolve nerved them both. With a simultaneous impulse each man stretched his hand to the other, and in a long firm clasp the two souls met. Then for action.

"Is it possible, think you, to reach that floor?" said Ashley; "the flames caught the back staircase, and it has fallen in. There are women-servants up there. We must reach them from outside. If you only knew the house, between us we might save much—life at least."

"The servants' windows look on to the kitchen yard where the ladder stands? It is not difficult; there are two ladders. I am quick handed."

"So I see, but the post of danger must not be yours alone."

"There are pictures, I have heard. There must be plate—your father's. There must be much to save, which you only can do, because you only know. We have each our work."

"Good thought! My mother's rooms are

locked. Pictures! Her picture—that must be saved, at any cost. Her rooms are threatened! Men,” he cried aloud, and his voice rang through the house above the roaring of the fire and wind, “come up to me in the long gallery. The White rooms must be saved! The fire gains!”

He ran forward with the three or four men who came at his call. The flames were travelling on to the very rooms he desired to save. Smoke was already pressing under the doors. This was a post of danger, too. Carefully he lowered his mother’s picture into the hall to the men he appointed to wait below. Caskets of hers, books of hers, needlework and paintings that had been done by her, were borne in safety into his own rooms, which, placed as they were, would probably be saved. Everything from Mrs. Ashley’s rooms was rescued. The men worked under his directions well and fearlessly. He was everywhere, cool and calm, the suffocating, blinding smoke, the hot breath of the flames advancing upon him, did not deter him.

The laundry flues had been over-heated, and

the fire originating in one wing of the house, had pursued its way, driven by the violent wind, towards the great hall in the centre of the building, round which ran an open gallery. If the flames gained the hall, the whole of the house would probably be destroyed. The supply of water was good, but, till the engines came, very little effect could be obtained by the few hands that worked against the fire.

Down the avenue came the sound of the gallop of horses, the rattle of the engines, and the shout of the firemen, answered by a shout from the house. A band of men from Stonefield had come down, headed by the Vicar, who took his work with the others, unnoticed in the crowd.

The water was playing upon the fire, gaining ground. With good fortune, and God to aid, the west wing, and the centre of the house, with the drawing-rooms, might be saved.

Working under the firemen's orders, grimed with smoke, fearless, and rushing first into danger, were the two gentlemen, Beauchamp Ashley and John Lester. They looked at and recognized each other as men may do on a bat-

tle-field, in the *mêlée* of some desperate charge. Most of the valuables were being saved, but the dining-room and billiard-room were threatened with entire destruction. The butler's pantry and the plate-room,—the latter fire-proof—were cut away from the rest of the burning mass, and a stream of water played upon the hot timbers, to isolate them from danger.

And where was Ned?

Having lashed a second ladder to the first, to gain height enough, he reached the level of the servants' rooms, and leaped in at the upper gallery window. He heard women's voices, speaking, sobbing, shrieking; he bade them dress quickly, and be silent. One woman, the under-housemaid, came out to him, dressed and trembling.

"Can we save any of our things? Tell me what to do, and I will try, sir. I am only afraid of doing nothing."

"Keep the others quiet, and wait till I come back to you. Who else are up here? Mr. Ashley said a page."

"Yes; the page sleeps at the far end of the corridor, and the housekeeper near by, and Mrs.



Durrant. Ellen Durrant is either in her room or the next. Are we safe here, sir ?”

“Yes, for a little while ; but there is a ladder out of the gallery window, by which I came up. If you are steady-footed, you may get down. Go one at a time, don’t hurry. Call first, and make a man come up and help you. The engines are coming down, I heard them as I ran up. Show me the rooms.”

The woman pointed along the corridor ; smoke was rolling along the end, concealing the length of it. The woman coughed, she looked up in his face.

“I don’t know who you are, sir, but you seem to know about everything. Will they be burned in their beds ? I ran out as soon as I heard the noise and awoke, and I saw the stairs fall in. I don’t know how long it had been burning. The young master was below, and I called down to him.”

He was already gone into the smoke, knocking at every door he passed, penetrating to the end of the corridor. One or two rooms were empty, one door was locked ; he drove it in with a kick : it was full of smoke, and the page

lay fast asleep in his bed; he would in a short time have been suffocated by the treacherous, insidious enemy, and not have suffered the pain of burning. Edmund waked him with a shake, waiting for a moment to see that the boy was not too terrified to save himself.

"Two minutes, my lad: huddle on some clothes: I doubt your saving anything but what may be under your hands. Run to the west end of the gallery towards the women's rooms. Go and see if you can help them—there is a ladder at the gallery window. Shut the window after everyone gets out, to stop the draught." Then he went on to the other rooms: in one, dressed and kneeling by her bedside, was a young woman, with her head buried in her crossed arms. He approached, touched her softly and said,

"Follow me quickly. I think you are safe."

She looked up at him wild-eyed, uttered a cry, and dropped her head again, not attempting to rise. He touched her again.

"I must go, don't be frightened; follow me."

He heard the roar of wind and flame, he knew the smoke was thicker. Outside there

was a louder sound of voices, and now there was the hissing and sputtering of water. The engines had come, and not too soon. The next room was empty: the next again was the housekeeper's. There he found the old woman dressing by the aid of a younger and still more trembling one. She had collected a quantity of things that she wanted to save. She ran to him with a handsome Indian box in her hands.

"Can I save that, sir? My son sent it me from India. I am afraid to drop it into the yard, it will be smashed. I have so many things here I want to keep—things my late mistress gave me."

"Never mind your things, time presses, it is as much as we shall do to save you. Bring that casket, then," seeing her look of pain; "bring that, we will try and save it. Roll that great shawl round you, and you," he said to the younger, "take the blanket off the bed—anything; it is a protection to your clothes. Follow me, quick!" he shouted, turning to look at the end of the corridor whence the smoke was rolling, and where the crackling

sound of burning wood was followed by a quick gleam of flame.

To the gallery window, where he had left the ladder, he hurried the old housekeeper, clinging to his arm, and looking behind her at the creeping foe. The gallant housemaid had already descended, and successfully piloted to the ground the other woman who was with her when Ned roused them. The page in his haste nearly broke his neck or limbs, entangling his feet, and losing his balance in the giddy height; but fortunately he was watched, and caught as he fell. There were two firemen now at the foot of the ladder.

"All safe sir! all there?" they cried. "Do you want help? Can you get the old lady down the ladder?"

For the housemaid had clapped her hands when she saw Ned leading the old woman.

"He's got Mrs. Barnes all safe, and Ann is behind her. Oh, thank God, thank God we're all safe!"

The narrow, giddy ladder frightened the old woman; she could not manage her limbs easily. How was she to lift herself up to that high

window, to turn round upon the ledge, and then be sure of setting her feet steady upon those open rungs? She clasped Ned's arm in a terror of despair.

"I cannot do it, sir, I know I can't! And you can't carry me, as you could 'a younger and lighter woman. I'm too heavy. I am afraid I must be left behind. Let Ann go on, at least."

"But there were three of you?" Ned said in blank horror as he helped Ann to mount to the window sill, and steadied her to put her feet on the ladder, where a man was waiting to guide her down. "There were three of you?" repeated Ned.

"Oh, good God! Ellen Durrant. She was in the room beyond mine. Never mind me, I am only an old woman, pray go to her! See how thick the smoke gets; the fire is coming on!"

"Don't be afraid," he said gently, "I will bring her yet, please God. Let me only put you in safety, then I shall be free to go for her. Try to get into the window again."

But it was in vain, the old woman could neither command her stiff limbs, nor could she

control the trembling that made her still more helpless. Ned leaned out of the window, and called to the firemen.

"Look sharp! bring the escape up here. Take Mrs. Barnes down; there is a woman left behind. Wait here for me some one, and be ready to help, or move to a further window if I call." And then he went back into the smoke that was rolling nearer and nearer along the corridor.

By the time the escape had been set, and the firemen had got the housekeeper into it, and lodged her safely on the ground, Ashley had done all that could be done in the way of preservation, and had come round to the back premises with Mr. Lester, and some Stonefield people.

"Thank God you are all safe, Mrs. Barnes!" Ashley said, shaking hands with her. "I have been round here, and the firemen told me Mr. Barton was doing all that could be done, and that you would all be saved; they begged me to see to the other part of the house."

"I hope all is safe, sir, but Mr. Barton is not down yet, he went back again to fetch Ellen

Durrant; she came in to help me for a few days, and her husband is away——”

“Barton gone back!” cried Ashley and Lester in a breath, “and for Ellen Durrant! Follow us, men!” and up the ladder went Ashley at a bound.

The firemen caught the Vicar, and insisted upon his remaining below.

“You can do no possible good, sir, there will be only an extra person to bring down. Mr. Ashley, you had better not go up, sir, one of us will be in waiting for Mr. Barton’s shout.”

But Ashley would not heed, he was already at the window which had been left open, and had increased the smoke and flames by causing a draught along the gallery; he sprang in and leaped to the ground, running along with his head low and a handkerchief across his mouth, which he moved once to shout Barton’s name.

Edmund had hastened back to the room where he had seen the woman kneeling. Surely she understood him? She was young, she was not too frightened to follow him; she was not ill.

The fire and water were fighting; he heard

the hissing and sputtering, and the smoke was frightful ; at the door of the housekeeper's room a figure was standing, looking at the foe.

"Come!" he cried, "come! I am waiting for you. I bid you come before."

She sprang away from him as he advanced into the room, and as he came on she pressed further and further away.

"Are you mad?" he said; "do you know that you are endangering both of us? Have you gone mad with terror? Poor soul!"

He went close to her, put out his arms to carry her, but she slipped through them to the ground.

"George," she moaned, as she lay in a heap on the floor; "George!"

Edmund stooped and took her up as he would have done a child, with tender, pitying strength, and looked calmly down into her face.

"Stay quiet," he said. "Only trust me, I will see you safe," thinking she was stupid with fright; and then he saw that the face he looked upon, the form he held, were those of Ellen Ward.

She struggled to free herself, and her face



grey ashy pale ; she looked up at him with wild eyes and quivering nostrils. "Let me die!" she breathed.

But he held her firmly, with a face like a rock, and close pressed lips.

"Please God I will save you yet. Come!"

Then he heard a shout, and in another moment Ashley had joined him. Ellen lay powerless in his arms, but there was no time to wait and see if she had fainted. Ashley went first. The fire was running along under the gallery ; a piece of the balustrade had fallen over ; he might risk passing those burning beams, but Barton could scarcely do so with the weight he bore, the footing was treacherous. He turned back.

"We must try some other means," he said ; "if the beams give way with you, you will both be killed in the fall. Shall I go back with you, and shout from the windows? or—you are a brave man—shall I go on alone, and bring the escape up to these windows?"

"Do that," said Ned, and went back with the burden still in his arms. He closed the door behind him, to keep out the smoke, with the unconscious woman laid across his knees.

The firemen were clamouring for some sign from within, when Ashley appeared at the gallery window. He gave his orders rapidly, and when the escape was newly set, he and a fireman mounted it together.

Ellen had recovered her consciousness, or rather speech, for she was quite unconscious now to whom she was speaking.

"George," she whispered, "I could not help it, George; indeed he came and fetched me, and the fire and smoke were so dreadful that I went. But I wanted you, George."

The fire gained upon the room, and Edmund wound the rope he still kept round Ellen, intending to lower her from the window by its means to the ground, if anyone were there to steady her descent; but no one had arrived, and in her helpless state he feared to risk it. He then determined to make a push for it along the gallery. The flooring cracked under his steps, and the flames along one side licked against his clothes as he fled. He had taken the precaution to roll a blanket round Ellen; her delay had made all the difference. As he ran a piece of burning wood fell from the ceiling and struck

him on the shoulder, singeing his face as it fell, and burning him severely. He staggered on, and succeeded in reaching the staircase window ; there was only his ladder there. Ashley had had the escape moved, hoping to save them from the housekeeper's window ; but he found the room empty, save for the fire, and he rushed back again to the window by which he had entered. John Lester alone had seen Edmund look out, and he, with no one now to prevent him, climbed the ladder to his assistance. Edmund lifted Ellen on to the window-sill, but she struggled violently, causing much delay, would not loose her hold of him, and raved that they wanted to take her away from George. She would not let Mr. Lester touch her, and it was only by the return of the men with the escape, when one of them fairly tore her away from Edmund, and held her tightly clasped in his arms, that they succeeded in taking her down.

Mr. Lester, still on the ladder, saw an angry tongue of flame leap up behind Barton, as he leaned over to watch the woman's safe descent, as if it grudged to lose its victims. He called

to Edmund to jump out, and as he stretched his hand to him, happening to touch the wall, it scorched him. He called out in terror a second time, and Edmund waved his hand in reply, sprang up as if to gain the window, and then suddenly he disappeared. The gallery floor had given way beneath him !

## CHAPTER X.

“**H**E is gone!” exclaimed Mr. Lester, but in a voice so low and hoarse from intense feeling that no one heard him, though he fancied he spoke in thunder.

“Come, sir—come!” shouted a helmeted man to Barton, as he supposed; “and you too, sir,”—touching the Vicar’s back. “It is time you were away; this wall is not sound. I’ve feared from the first that all this wing must go. What on earth has become——”

He stopped in horror at the Vicar’s face, and understood what had happened. Ashley had been stooping over poor Ellen, who lay exhausted with her own violence; he perceived what had occurred when the two men descended.

“Barton lost!” he cried, in an agonised voice

—"and to save me and my house! Give me your clothes, man,—your helmet, quick! Go with me if you will, but I must find him—no one but I. Why, I tell you I know every cranny of the house; I can find my way where you would lose yours."

As he put on the accoutrements, he called to his man-servant, who stood near him.

"See to my rooms; I shall bring Mr. Barton there in whatever condition. There is no more to be done. Keep the people away from this wall—the firemen think it will come down. Send some one over to Riverford for Doctor Brenchley. Order out a horse and cart—whatever comes easiest, and have Mrs. Durrant taken home. Do me the favour, Mrs. Barnes, to go with her. I will see you to-morrow." He held up his hand, and pointed to the grey east—"it is to-morrow already. What a night! Good-bye, Lester, and thank you very much. Go home—there is no more to do. Thank you all, thank you all."

Then he turned, followed by two firemen, and broke his resistless way through the windows and heavy shutters of a small room leading

to the hall; and thence, fierce and reckless, checked by no obstacle, he struggled on to where the fire had been the hottest, and where it claimed its only victim. They found Edmund lying senseless, bleeding, on a heap of half-burned rubbish—some of the gallery flooring had fallen on him as he fell. They carried him out into the air, and laid him on the grass. Ashley sponged his head and face and throat, removing some of the signs left upon him of his deadly peril, and poured some brandy between his parched lips.

The morning dawned, wild and grey, upon his pale features and bruised form, as he returned to consciousness, though at present it was the consciousness of pain. He smiled faintly when he recognised Ashley's face under the helmet, and tried to rouse himself.

"I feel all broken to pieces," he said; "but I suppose it is fancy. I will move presently; just now——"

And again he became senseless. They carried him and laid him upon Ashley's bed. The Vicar proposed to take him to the Vicarage, but Ashley frowned, and would not hear of it.

Again Edmund recovered, and looking round, begged that they would take him home to his mother—he would be soon better there. But Ashley overruled him.

“Stay here with me,” he said; “your mother shall come to you.”

And beckoning to his servant, he ordered a man and chaise to go to High-beeches, and bring Mrs. Barton to her son at once.

Before the doctor came, Ashley and Lester had undressed and bandaged the wounded man, and had done all except setting his broken arm. As he grew more comfortable and stronger, he told them of his fall.

The fire had been so close to him as he ran along the gallery with Mrs. Durrant in his arms that he felt sure it must have singed her clothes and feet. He had pulled his handkerchief across her face that she might not see the glare. He had known, as he stood waiting with her in the window, endeavouring to soothe her, and make her obedient to the orders of the firemen, that every instant increased the danger. He thought to the last that he was safe, but just as he had sprung to the window the



floor gave way with him. He had not lost his presence of mind ; he had been used to diving, and turning somersaults in the water, and he had tried now to help himself by some such means. He caught hold of a girder as he fell, thinking to swing himself thence more easily, and out of reach of the flames, as a trapezist might do ; but it was nearly red-hot, and burned him severely.

He opened one of his maimed hands as he spoke ; the other arm was broken, and he looked at both the powerful limbs ruefully, as he had been wont to do when doubting to what use he should put them.

He had let go his hold of the girder, he said, from the exquisite pain burning had caused him, and then he fell where they found him, fortunate at least in having broken his fall, and not been killed. He had tried to move, but found it impossible, and afterwards a piece of the gallery flooring had fallen on him, stunning and bruising him, and he was suffocated with dust and smoke.

"I believe the whole place would have been destroyed," said Ashley, when the doctor came,

and had set Edmund's arm, "if it had not been for Barton. My messenger met the engines on their way here; Barton had already despatched them." And then he told the story as it had occurred, with eyes glistening with tears. "The only thing I regret now is that I listened to him, and let him go to the servants' rooms. He said there was no immediate danger, and that he was very nimble. I let him go, and he has barely escaped with life. I cannot think now how I could have been so besotted."

"You did perfectly right. I knew nothing about the house, and if anyone had gone on my errand, either not as strong or not as nimble as I am, I think—they would probably not have escaped."

"You had a great deal of trouble, too, with Mrs. Durrant, poor young woman! the glare and the danger frightened her out of her senses. I wish, Dr. Brenchley, you would kindly see her for me; she seemed almost frantic. She was one of our housemaids for some years, and then she married George Durrant, the carpenter, at Stonefield, a very respectable fellow. To make matters worse, he is away

from home, working for Lord Riverford. He will be terribly upset to come back and find his wife in such a state, poor man! Do go and see her before you return, and let me know how she goes on. She was rather a favourite with our old housekeeper, who asked her to come here whilst her husband was away. I shall be anxious to do anything in my power, but I suspect Lester will be able to do more for her than anyone else can. Come and see my patient again to-morrow, Dr. Brenchley; Mrs. Barton will be here shortly, so he will not want for care."

Ned lay still and let them talk, and when his mother came, he listened to what had become now an old story to him,—the account of the fire, of his own courage, and of poor Ellen Durrant's narrow escape; of her violence, and of her terror. He knew the whole secret of which they saw but a corner—or, rather, he knew the hidden meaning, whilst they saw but the outside show.

Mrs. Barton came self-possessed and calm to her son's room, ready to meet any emergency, and to undergo any fatigue for him. She

turned a little pale when she saw how battered he was ; but she smiled, too, as he said,

“You have come to take possession of me again, mother, just as when I was a baby. I am pretty nearly as helpless, for both my hands are useless. I shall give you a world of trouble, but it is better to trouble you than anyone else.”

He had some restless, feverish nights, for he had been a good deal hurt, and he was anxious in mind. He had meant to go to London, and to settle his fate, and now it was impossible. He had asked a week from Miss Blount, to think over her proposition, but, at the end of it, he could give her no more definite answer than when she made it.

Several times he thought he would tell his mother all that was in his heart, but he resisted the inclination. Why, because he was weak in body, should his soul be less strong to bear the burden laid upon it? Patience would do a great deal for him ; he must wait. He lay on the couch, and looked out of Ashley's windows, and thought of the lessons he had learned at different times ; and now this one of patience,

that had been so evidently learned by his mother, the virtue of which she had shown her children for so many years, he must learn, at least in some degree. A difficult lesson, too, for his active, energetic spirit, which was suddenly beaten back from the goal to which it was reaching.

His mother read to him, and he listened, or let his thoughts wander at will ; but more often he lay still, with his eyes closed, and thought, as she sat at work, or when the evening shadows fell he talked to her about Australia. She never wearied of hearing about McLean and Christina and Laddie, and she often told him she could picture the station and its occupants perfectly.

"I wish you would write to McLean for me, mother," he said one day. "I ought to have written to him last week, but I put it off, and now I cannot write with this maimed arm of mine. People ought to be taught to use their left hands, I think ; I could begin to hold a pen with that, you see. I want McLean to know about this accident, and that it is not idleness that will keep me silent so long. He knows I shall

not go out again as soon as I intended, and indeed promised."

He dictated his letter carefully, looking out at the waving of the great branches in the Park, and not observing his amanuensis till he heard her sigh when he dictated and she wrote the sentences about his delayed return ; then he looked round quickly, and caught the pained expression of her face, though she uttered no dissentient word. He got up from the couch, and, leaning over her, kissed her softly as she bent over the letter. Here was an additional inducement to get well, and to settle his plans, but he said nothing.

That afternoon Miss Blount was admitted to see him. She had been terribly concerned about his accident, and had called once or twice already to inquire. Fire was the peculiar danger that she most dreaded, and though in this case it was her neighbour's, not her own, property that had suffered, she shuddered at the appearance now presented by the fine old house as she drove up the avenue. She trembled as she came into the presence of the wounded man, and for a moment feared to lift

her eyes to his—a tall, strong woman, in perfect health—before what she knew to be an injured, scarred man.

“I am so glad you have come to me,” he said, in the old low tones she knew quite well, and she looked up at him at once. “I have been dictating a letter, and am tired. Foolish, is it not? One would have supposed a big fellow like me could have borne more knocking about, but it seems one is wrong. I have not even a hand to offer you.” He looked at his helpless, bandaged members. “They are getting better, however.”

She saw his scarred face, with eyebrows, whiskers, moustaches singed closely, and his muscular frame lying there powerless, and her heart went out to him. She would fain have grasped his hand in token of regard and sympathy, but, this being impossible, with something very like tears in her eyes, she stooped down and kissed him on the brow, saying, in a low, shaky voice,

“You did a brave man’s duty, Edmund, and I honour you.”

That kiss to her wounded son wiped out of

Mrs. Barton's heart the remembrance of every little slight and hurt she had received from Hannah Blount.

Miss Blount and Edmund had a short conference on business, but she had the good feeling not to refer to the proposition she had made him the night of the fire. The two ladies chatted a little, and Miss Blount expressed her regret at seeing so fine a place so much injured, and said she was sorry to learn that Mrs. Durrant had not recovered the shock she had undergone, and that her husband was in great grief when she inquired. But Miss Blount had no idea who Mrs. Durrant was; the different persons who knew portions of her history did not know the whole, with two signal exceptions, and one of those two did not know that the other was even aware of her existence.

Edmund was very anxious to know how the poor young woman he had rescued was going on, and his anxiety seemed very natural. Ashley went himself every day into Stonefield to inquire, and brought the report to Edmund, but for a week there was no sign of improvement. At the end of that time the Vicar wrote to his sister:



“DEAR ROSE,—I want you at home, if my mother can spare you. Mrs. Durrant does not improve. George is worn out with grief and watching. He asked me last night if I could get you to come down, if only for a short time; he says Ellen likes you, and when he asked her if she would like to see you, she said in a whisper, ‘Yes, but don’t tell anyone, or perhaps they will take me away from you again, as they did the other night.’ She seems to know almost everyone about her, but she will not speak to them, and lays her finger on her lips when anyone enters the room, whispering ‘Hush!’ and then clings to George, and hides her face against his breast. Brenchley says the shock has been very severe; he talks sometimes of the propriety of sending her from home—to some asylum, of course—but George will not hear of it, nor indeed will his mother. I must do her the justice to say, all that affection can do she does, but Ellen is afraid of everyone but George. It is not a happy mission to return for her, but still I want you, so come. You will be glad to hear that Edmund Barton is much better; he is sadly disfigured at

present, but he sleeps now, and does not seem to have injured his head, as Brenchley at first feared. He will go home as soon as he can be moved. Beauchamp will not allow him to be disturbed, although his father, Mr. Ashley, came down yesterday, and is anxious to restore the house at once. Beauchamp would not let his father go and see Barton, for fear he should think himself an obstruction. I never saw Beauchamp to greater advantage; not for long has he been so cheerful and contented. The fact is, he has a very kind heart, and now he is giving it free exercise. There is however some grave cause of discontent between Beauchamp and his father; I have heard various reports, but I give no credence to them. My long letter resolves itself into three words at last: Come home soon.

“Your affectionate brother,

“JOHN BLOUNT LESTER.”

Rose answered her brother's letter in person, to his great joy.

“I believe I want you as much as anyone does, Rosie? I am horribly dull without you.

There is a confession for a reverend Vicar to make ! but it is true. I have fifty things to say to you, but I want you first of all to go and see Mrs. Durrant. I believe I have grown, not nervous exactly, but restless, since that fire ; no one knows the terrible shock of such a scene but those who have experienced it. I suppose it is much the same with every great danger ; one feels as if the rest of one's life were changed, and oneself a different person."

"Just think if a peril past produces such an effect upon people who live quiet lives like you and me, Jack, what wonderful influence upon character must be exerted by the constant presence of danger, and the perpetual effort to surmount difficulties."

"You are really only uttering a truism, Rose, but it is one not half enough considered. Just as virtue does not consist in ignorance, but in resistance of vice, so strength of character is only obtained by exercise in overcoming every sort of obstacle, and in enduring every hardship. *Proven* is a very fine word, I think, whether for armour or men ; the most valuable metal is that which has passed the most often

through the hands of the artificer, and been most tried by the fire; the finest statue has borne the greatest amount of toil. We are like metal or marble in the hands of our great Artificer; however rough the block in which we have been hewn, His will, His care, His working will bring us to be stately pillars, adorning His wonderful design, His great temple of the Universe. It has always to be remembered that we are sentient blocks, capable of assisting in, and of marring, our development. Whilst you go down to the Durrants I shall go and see Barton. I have not seen him for the last two days; have you any message for his mother?"

"I will walk to the turn of the road with you," she said, and provided herself with a thread out of her work-box before going out. She pulled some primroses as she passed the garden borders, and some of the young crumpled leaves, and tied them, with a few violets, into a little bunch as she walked at her brother's side.

"Give my dear love to Mrs. Barton," she said as they parted, "and tell her I will come and see her when she goes home. Tell her,

too, how I rejoice at her son's recovery; and give these flowers to Edmund. I have no more to say."

Rose went into the Durrants' house, and found it in a state of great horror and excitement. Ellen had had a better night than usual, and George ventured to go to work for an hour or two—he had sadly neglected it in these last days. During his absence, the doctor had called and recurred to a suggestion he had made before, that Ellen should go away from home for a time at least—he thought the change would conduce to her cure; he advised this in perfect good faith, but he was unwise in suggesting it in her presence—still more unwise in not giving the advice to herself, and in speaking in undertones.

She put herself into a frenzy of despair and anger. Her overwrought, weakened nervous system was not proof against her passion. She wept, she protested, she stormed. Away from home?—where was she to go? There was no place for her but here, with George. She sprang up from the low chair in which she had been sitting at work, stormed about

the room, and wrung her hands, raving in a varying, discordant voice, with glittering eyes. If they wanted to get rid of her, they had better say so—nothing was easier. She had never harmed them—she did not wish to do so. They had been kind to her; but she did not care to live, if it must be away from George. She was not obliged to live. Yes, she would die! The glittering eyes had seen their opportunity, and, before any one was aware, she had seized a long-bladed knife of her husband's, and wounded herself severely in the breast.

With the doctor's orders they secured ~~her~~ hands, and laid her down, struggling terribly, whilst her wound was dressed, and they sent for George. He had just arrived when Rose entered the house. George had just put off his paper cap and washed his ruddy face before going into his wife's room; he had been told to come directly, she was very ill—nothing more. He went in, and stood horror-struck on the threshold. Rose was behind him. The poor fellow wiped great drops of sweat from his brow; but he mastered himself soon, and gently approached

the bed on which Ellen lay bound and exhausted.

"Why, Nelly, my girl," he said, in tones so tender, so full of repressed pain, that they brought tears to Rose's eyes, "what has gone wrong now?"

She struggled to move, but could not, and gnashed her teeth with despair.

"Don't stir, dear—lie still for a minute. Have you hurt yourself? Why is she bound?"

He looked round with reproachful eyes, like a suffering animal.

"I wanted to die, George," she sobbed.

"To die!—and leave me, Nelly? That was not fair, my girl, to go without my leave. Be still, be still!"

He was busy unfastening the knots that held her. She was weeping, and his mother wiped the tears as they rolled down off her cheeks.

"I am responsible for her," he said fiercely; "she shall have no bonds but these."

He took her into his arms as he spoke, and laid her head against his breast.

"Tell me what troubled you, Nelly, and we will try and set it right. But don't talk of

dying. Remember you must have my leave first."

She was murmuring "George, George," as if there were healing in the words; and then she looked up at him, and said more rationally, "They said they would send me away from you; they whispered for me not to hear, but I heard. They would have stolen me, and I would rather die."

"Hush!" he said, and laid his hand against her lips.

"I did try to die, though," she whispered. "I tell you everything. I promised you once I would. I did try—see," and she showed him the wound she had made; his great hot tears rained down upon her breast; "but I won't again, if you don't wish it. They said I might go for a little while to my father and mother, and see if that change would do me good. Why,"—and she sat up, and looked round at the bystanders with a proud surprise—"my father and mother! I have no father and mother—but you." And she fell back weeping against his breast.

The tender pathos of her voice touched every



heart. Old Mrs. Durrant wept aloud, and Rose took her by the arm and led her away. Dr. Brenchley beckoned to the rest.

"Leave them alone together," he said, blowing his nose and coughing; "we have no right to interfere there just now."

Ellen had a severe attack of brain-fever, and Rose nursed her through it all. With the curious aberration of mind that attaches to a diseased brain, the only person she recognised was Rose; she never knew her husband; and through all her illness her fixed idea was that she had been taken away from George. She talked of it perpetually.

"I think it will come right; I think he will find me some day," she would say wistfully. "When I see you, Miss Lester, I feel as if it could not be all wrong."

Poor George would steal into the room if he heard her speaking, and out again to hide his bursting grief, and his disappointment that she did not know him.

She talked to Rose unreservedly, but if any one else came in she would break off and lay her finger on her lips, saying, "Hush, hush!—

we must not tell them all we know." She often talked incoherently about the fire, but to Rose alone she said,

"I was a little afraid, not much, at the fire; the noise and the smoke blinded me; but when I heard his voice I was frightened. I wanted George to come, not *him*; but he came—he would come—twice—more than twice. I had not wished to see him again. I thought I could die—perhaps I could, you know. And I kneeled down to say my prayers. I thought perhaps God would let me die so. One is not always burned; that must be horrid! Did you know I burned my feet against the walls when he ran with me that night? They hurt me very much. But one might be stifled, and that is not so painful, I think, is it?—do you know? But he would not let me; he dragged me, carried me. I did not wish it—I did not want him to take me—I called for George—I did indeed; but *he* did not come, only the other came. Why did he bring me and leave me here?—why? And why did you come to me? Were you sorry for me, or did you like him? Yes, I know that I am ill. Is it because I burned my feet?—or

did I fall that night, do you know. I am hurt here, too," pointing to her breast. "I wanted to die; I don't know why now. I don't remember anything any more."

To Rose she talked of other things—of her earlier life, and of *him*, for she never spoke his name. She had been very young when he left her, and her imagination had been much disturbed. Rose read to her, sang to her, talked to her—little sentences and little songs, full of sweet, tender, restful thoughts; she shared with no one the charge of this young stricken soul, and she rarely left her. Her watchful care was repaid; Ellen became quieter and more rational, and one night asked softly,

"If I were to pray God very much, do you think He would let me find George again?"

"I do think so," answered Rose, earnestly, with her hand passing gently to and fro over Ellen's close-cropped head.

For a day or two afterwards Rose kept George away from his wife, and then she brought him herself into the room, and led him to the chair in which Ellen sat looking out into the garden, with weak, idle hands lying on her

lap. She heeded very little in those days, and, though she knew there was some one near her, she did not at once turn her head. At last she looked round slowly, a smile broke over her pale face, and with an expression of pleased surprise, like that of a tired little child that has run suddenly against something he finds to be his mother, she said,

“George, George, so you have found me at last!”

Her memory had found him, rather; and as the fond, faithful man leaned his head against the back of her chair, and furtively wiped away tears he could not restrain, she stroked his head and face and arms caressingly.

“I shall get well now you are come,” she said.

She fell asleep that night with her hand in his; she had found him, and found rest.

## CHAPTER XI.

“THIS was a terrible disaster, Beauchamp.

It will take months to put the place in anything like order,” said Mr. Ashley, surveying the ruins of the east wing of his house. “However, we must be thankful it is no worse. I have been all round with Kemp this morning; I only waited to have a talk to you about certain details before giving him final orders. He is to overlook the whole place, and send me in plans as soon as possible. But I want to know what you would like about the dining-room. The general plan had better not be altered, the house is very convenient—don’t you think so?”

“Yes, very,” said Beauchamp carelessly.

“The justice-room was doomed before you heard anything of the fire, I suspect. Its position was convenient, and the offices were good,

I don't think we can improve upon any of them. But as we must rebuild here, have you any fancy about arrangements?"

"None whatever, they were very good before."

"Yes, but I doubt if we can restore them exactly. In that case have you no wishes? no suggestion to offer?" said Mr. Ashley rather testily, turning to look at his son.

"No, indeed, I have not. I would leave the matter to Kemp."

"God bless me! leave it to an architect! You really do not know what you are talking of. A pretty bill we should have to pay, and a nice mess he would make of it! I have no opinion of architects in general, and Kemp——"

"Why employ him, then?" asked Beauchamp abruptly.

"You do not seem to me to take the slightest interest in the matter, Beauchamp. I am surprised you did not let the place burn, so you saved your own skin."

"Are you? it would hardly accord with my usual conduct," answered the younger man with a little smile, "not to exert myself to save so

fine a place. I am hardly selfish enough to have suffered your property to be destroyed so ruthlessly."

"My property! God bless me! it is yours too. I don't want you to care for it because it is mine, but because it will be yours. You are always fencing with me now-a-days, Beauchamp. You cannot surely dislike this place!—you cannot surely prefer your beggarly little hole to this."

"Pray be civil," laughed Beauchamp, "to my *estate*, in Somersetshire; and do not be vexed when I say I do prefer it,—for one reason very much, that it has no unpleasant memories."

Mr. Ashley frowned and stamped up and down amongst the ruins; at last, having controlled his anger, he said,

"Be reasonable; you will come and live here after me, your children will be born here; it is impossible that you should have no regard for the place, and it must matter more to you than to me how it is restored. So once more I return to the charge—what shall we do with the dining-room? We cannot have such a ceiling again as this was, but I told Kemp to speak to

Morant about decorations, his taste is excellent. I only want to know what style you prefer, that we may have no mistakes afterwards."

"I really have no wish or feeling about the matter. Do use your own judgment, or leave it all to Morant. I shall be perfectly satisfied, I have no doubt."

"I have some doubt; and I wish you were not so easily satisfied on this point—it takes a great deal to satisfy you on some others. I should have thought, too, you might wish to consult Gertrude's taste; you would like to please your wife."

"The probabilities are I shall have no wife," said Beauchamp, coldly; "certainly not Miss Brabazon. I am not at all prepared to carry out that engagement."

Mr. Ashley ejaculated something very like an oath.

"I really shall be perfectly satisfied with whatever you like to do here. You have extremely good taste, my dear father, and you really cannot do better than trust to it. I shall see you at dinner, and we can speak again of this, if you wish it. If you will excuse me now,



I want to go and see my patient, I always pay him a visit in the afternoon."

"What, Mr. Barton? When is he going to leave? He surely must be nearly well enough now. The first time I came down you mentioned, I think, that it would be a week before he could be removed, and I purposely have stayed away for that time. Don't misunderstand me, I do not in the least wish to turn him out, but the builders can hardly get to work with a sick man in the house."

"He has been out this morning, and would have left to-day, if I would have permitted it. He would leave now if he had the slightest idea that you wished it, perhaps even if he thought you were down. I did not tell him of your coming, for fear he should think he was in the way. He behaved so extremely well and kindly, that I wish to consider him in every way."

"Undoubtedly. Yes, yes, he must have behaved very courageously. I think I ought to go and see him, and thank him myself. I fancy, from what you said, the destruction here would have been much greater if it had not been for his presence of mind. I should like to see him.

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I remember thinking him a fine fellow when I met him at Lord Riverford's. Tell him I will come and see him presently, if he will allow me. Is he much disfigured?"

"A good deal at present, but he will improve."

The first thing that Beauchamp saw in the room where Edmund sat reading, was the bunch of primroses that Rose had sent him, and by an irresistible impulse he stooped and smelled them."

"I am so fond of early flowers," he said, and, either instinctively, or from something in Edmund's face, he knew whose hand had plucked the flowers. Edmund, too, at once perceived his visitor's thoughts.

After a little desultory talk, Beauchamp rose to go, saying,

"My father is down, he proposes to pay you a visit, if it suited you."

"He is very kind; of course I shall be glad. And to-morrow, I think, Mr. Ashley, I may go home."

"There can be no occasion for hurry. Pray stay as long——"

"Oh, thanks! but I may stay too long. I am ashamed of having trespassed till now on your kindness; only that you have been so kind" (he emphasized the word, and smiled, the rare, sweet smile in which a man's generous soul unveils itself), "I could hardly have remained thus long."

The Ashleys, father and son, spent that evening with Edmund and his mother, in Beauchamp's rooms. The conversation was confined to indifferent subjects. The topic that had been at issue in the earlier part of the day was unmentioned.

But on the next day, when the Bartons were gone, and father and son were alone, Mr. Ashley began, in business-like fashion:

"It is time, Beauchamp, I understood a little better what are your views for the future. It is very natural I should like to see you married and settled. I have been disappointed in your career; neither army, nor church, nor parliament, and you might have chosen either of the three. But no matter for that now, we will waive it; still, I must tell you that I think it a thousand pities that a man of your education,

and with your position and prospects, should be such an entire cypher in the world. The thing I want to ask you, however, is,—what did you mean yesterday about never marrying, and what was the allusion you made to Gertrude Brabazon? You must marry her; it is incumbent on you as a man of honour to fulfil your engagements.”

“I do not see why I should make her and myself miserable—that cannot be a point of honour. Besides, I think you are not aware of the way Miss Brabazon left this house after the Hunt ball. She is keen-sighted enough, she probably came to the conclusion that I regretted my engagement; I very likely gave her cause to do so, but, at any rate, she left the next morning, before luncheon, and without saying Good-bye to me.”

“I remember; Maud said something to me about it, but I was busy, and took no notice. I thought it was a mere woman’s quarrel, and, since then, I had forgotten it. I regret extremely that Gertrude should have gone away annoyed, and still more that it should have been your fault. However, that can all be set

right—lovers' quarrels, one understands all that quite well. You must go and see the young lady; she is attached to you, I know, and I will speak to Sir George. You were surely not going to stand off for so slight and foolish a matter?"

"I am quite aware it is useless to argue this matter with you; you and I look at marriage from a different point of view. I must ask you, though, not to speak to Sir George; I feel quite sure Miss Brabazon has not mentioned the subject to him. I am sorry to hear you say that she is attached to me; I would not willingly give her pain. There could have been no occasion for it, but people—women—are so very officious. I suppose Maud and my aunt Fellowes have talked to poor Gertrude about me ever since she was so high; and she has taken me into her fancy, and lived on the idea; but she is a proud girl, and will not want weaning from her fancies. I do not suppose she will die of disappointment, people seldom do; but she certainly would die rather than be my wife against my wish."

"This is rather high-flown talk, Beauchamp.

I daresay it is all right, and I know, with you young men of fashion" (Beauchamp winced and coloured), "it is quite habitual to talk thus; but you must excuse my business-like, practical, and old-fashioned mode of looking at things. Here is a match very desirable to all parties, upon which your mother's mind was earnestly set, to which she had pledged herself, which is in every respect satisfactory to me,—and for a whim,—for I suspect it is little more,—you would cry off. If you don't consider your own interests, in a worldly point of view—you could not form a better alliance—nor my desire, you might consider the dying wishes of your mother. I can hardly understand your disregarding them, especially as you know the reason for them, too."

"That is all true. I know that my mother wished me to marry Gertrude, the only child of the man to whom she had been herself attached, whom she had left at the instigation of her parents to marry you, because you had the better position then, and the larger fortune; and after all, George Brabazon became the baronet, and inherited large property. He, too, made

another worldly marriage like my mother's, and has, without exception, the richest and most bejewelled and most worldly-minded wife in London; and so, in spite of your own spoilt lives, the utter failures they have been—or, perhaps, indeed, through the cruel irony of your own disappointment, you would force the same wretched lot upon your children. You are surprised at me, at my perversity, my caprice—Gertrude's parents are doubtless surprised at her: how should we be anything else but monstrosities in some way or other? If people will do the conventional, the unnatural, they must expect astounding and disappointing results; it is but the old saying, they 'sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind.'"

Mr. Ashley sat quite still, with his hand pressed across his eyes; the bitterness of his son's tone and spirit struck home to him, and he remembered, as a lightning flash sometimes reveals a whole landscape, most of the details of his married life—remembered, with a pang of regret for his own disappointment, his wife's sad, weary, broken life. He sighed heavily, and then drew himself up with an effort at calm-

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ness, and with the pride that cannot brook sympathy from another, but regards it as an intrusion.

"And yet," he said, slowly, and with some hesitation, "you listened to our wishes and plans for you. You must at least be aware we desired your welfare, and you gave no sign that you did not agree with our views. Gertrude is an amiable and talented girl; your mother was fond of her, you were much with her—you seemed to like her society; you made no objections when we proposed to you that you should marry her—nay more, you acceded to it. There was no actual engagement between you, but for a long time there has been a tacit one; you cannot deny that you lent yourself, and very readily too, to our wishes."

"It is true, but—I was to blame. I do not love Gertrude."

After some silence Mr. Ashley began again:

"I am very sorry there should be any difficulty of this kind between you; but of course I cannot wish to see my only son unhappy. Will you tell me, Beauchamp, have you formed another attachment? I do not wish to intrude



upon your confidence, but I cannot help being interested in the matter."

"I have done so, but I have made no engagements,—to be honest with you, I have not been able to do so."

"I fail now to understand you. Do you mean that you are attached to a girl, that she knows it, and does not return your affection?"

Beauchamp nodded.

"Good Heavens! what do you mean? Does not the girl like you? A man in your position, and with your advantages, to sue in vain! Why, it's inconceivable—unheard of! Who is she?"

"Miss Lester. You have met her several times."

"A very nice girl. I have not a word to say against her. I found her very charming myself. I cannot say I wished my only son to marry her; but still——You alarmed me just now. I was afraid you had made some foolish or very unworthy choice. Miss Lester—she is a nice, lady-like girl, pretty enough; she ought to have some money from her aunt; she is often at Lady Riverford's too. Well, yes, Beau-

champ, I am sorry for Gertrude, but Rose Lester has fine health, and a grand seat on horseback. She will make a handsome mistress of Broadstone."

"My dear father, I am very sorry to disappoint you, but Miss Lester declines that enviable position."

"God bless me! What has come to all you young people? You manage your affairs very badly. What does the girl want or expect? Refuse a fine establishment, such as you can give her! You made her an offer, and she will have none of you! There must be some misunderstanding; the young lady cannot have comprehended your meaning. She was shy, modest, thought you could not have been in earnest. My dear boy, let me go and see her brother for you; it would perhaps be carrying it too far for me to plead your cause with the young lady herself, but I will do that if you like."

"Rose Lester!" laughed Beauchamp with some bitterness, and a sarcastic feeling at his own ridiculous position, "she is anything but modest or shy in your acceptation of those words, she is one of the proudest, most digni

fied women I know ; she has no idea of inequality between us—indeed, I am sorry to say the inferior position belongs to me. She considers I did not behave well to her. I had better explain it to you. When I met her, I was extremely pleased with her, found her society delightful, and admired her greatly ; nothing had been settled as to Miss Brabazon, though of course it was understood that I was to be her husband. I amused myself, in the meantime, with Miss Lester. I have reason to suppose she became interested in, I will not now say attached, to me. I was gratified ; it was too pleasant to be with her for me to tell her the truth ; and finally I—fell in love, what other expression can I use ? I had then been abroad with my mother and the Brabazons. I had given my promise, and had committed myself. I thought I could slip loose from Miss Lester at any time, but I believe one day I talked some nonsense, or the best of all sense, whichever you please to designate it, to her, and she suspected me at once. Before that she had heard me talk of worldly position and advantages, society, fashion, what not ; and her simple, upright nature

detected the points on which, our education at least, had made our lives and views dissimilar, and on which we really were at that time dissimilar, unsympathetic. I had better speak the whole unlucky truth. I say advisedly, at that time, because now I have, or she has, considerably modified my views; things that used to appear of great moment and paramount importance, have lost their attraction and value for me; I see them in a perfectly different light, the glamour is all gone from the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them; and the only thing that appears to me worthy and desirable is a true and mutual, true because mutual love. Whether this mood will always continue is more than I can say, the world may claim its own, as the devil is said to do, or I may become—and this is the more likely—a cold, hard man, because a disappointed one. I made Miss Lester an offer, in spite of the position in which I stood to Miss Brabazon. Piqued by her avoidance of, and coldness to me, which my vanity could not endure, all the affection that had been growing for her, though I had concealed it from myself, arose and mastered my worldly prudence, my re-

solves. I proposed to Miss Lester, and she refused me. I have no doubt Maud lent her little aid to increase Miss Lester's feeling of wounded pride and delicacy; she certainly was not flattered by my tardy offer, she had gauged my low standard of happiness, of human nature, and my own worth and dignity, and she had conquered any attraction she may have felt towards me. She also thought I was behaving ill to Gertrude, for they are friends. Maud, of course, told her I was engaged to her. Don't let us say any more about the matter—it is a bad business."

"It is indeed, Beauchamp; I am annoyed, and I am sorry, but I should have thought you had been man of the world enough to know that it is only with a married woman you can afford to make intimacies, and seek for *sympathy*—I think that was your word just now?" and Mr. Ashley laughed a cold ironical laugh, that was not good to hear.

Beauchamp turned away with a grave, hard face; he was by no means in the mood for levity.

"There's nothing to be done," he said, "pray

let us drop the subject ; the only misfortune is that something in my manner at the Hunt ball seems to have attracted Miss Brabazon's attention, and she acted upon it. I did not mean to give her pain. Pray do not attempt to see either Mr. Lester or Sir George Brabazon, it will do no good. Amuse yourself with the restoration here, please yourself entirely, I can engage to be perfectly content. I shall go to Somerset shortly and paint, or write a poem, and in my own fashion 'make for myself a solitude and call it peace.' There is no use in talking any more. You will breakfast at nine to-morrow? Good night."

Mr. Ashley was sadly annoyed and perturbed; he did not sleep well that night. He was fond of, and admired, his son in a selfish way, but he had a curious and uneasy feeling that there might be something in what he had been saying, and that there were certain disadvantages that, under particular circumstances, might arise and counterbalance the advantages of wealth and position. He thought again and again over the discomforts of his own past life, and the sorrow, the anxiety, the wretchedness

(he dared use no other words now), of his dead wife—lives that they had each endeavoured to make endurable by trying first one and then another palliative, in which endeavour they had signally failed.

But Mr. Ashley could not follow his son's request not to interfere in his affairs, and not to make any communications to Mr. Lester. He had occasion to go over to Riverford, and on his return he called at Stonefield Vicarage, where he found the Vicar in a very old coat working in his garden, and directing the labours of two lads, whom he was patiently training into being as good gardeners as himself, and who would ere long be replaced by two other rough lads, ignorant of the difference between spinach and cauliflower, and to whom asparagus and sea-kale were mere words.

It was part of the Vicar's theory of education to train the boys in the village school to various useful offices, in his own house and under his own eye. Although he was often laughed at, he had no more plates broken by his page than had other people by more pretentious servants; his horse was as well groomed as other people's,

and, with the exception of such gardens as those at Broadstone Park, or Riverford Hall, Rose had vegetables and fruit as early and late as her neighbours, and flowers always stood in her drawing-room.

It was rather difficult for Mr. Ashley to approach the subject of his present visit, but after some circumlocution he asked after Miss Lester. The Vicar replied that his sister was well, that she had been in London, but that he had sent for her to come and nurse the young woman who had received so terrible a mental shock in the fire at Broadstone.

“Ah!” said Mr. Ashley, “and the young woman had been a servant in my house. I wish, Mr. Lester” (he pulled out his note-case, and put two five-pound notes into the Vicar’s hand), “you would spend this for me for her benefit. The husband is well-to-do, I believe, but in time of sickness very many things are wanted, and pecuniary assistance is not wasted.—How particularly good and kind of your sister!—so few women are capable of such a trust and responsibility. Such a post would require courage and kindness. She is a very charming person, Miss



Lester." (The Vicar bowed.) "I was, however, unaware until yesterday that my son has taken the same, or indeed a stronger, interest in your sister, and, even more than I do, admires her. May I venture to ask you if her affections are disengaged? My son would fain hope so."

"My sister has not confided to me the state of her affections," answered the Vicar, speaking more coldly than before.

"Beauchamp has some idea that Miss Lester may have misunderstood a communication that he made to her. He is my only son, and I earnestly wish to see him happy; it is chiefly on his account that I have called on you to-day."

"My sister has not consulted me on the subject—has not, to the best of my belief, mentioned Mr. Beauchamp Ashley's name to me. I cannot force her confidence," said the Vicar, in yet colder and more dignified tones.

Mr. Ashley found his visit was thrown away, and after a few commonplace remarks he took his leave.

## CHAPTER XII.

ROSE returned to the Vicarage when she was able to leave her patient. Her brother found her looking so pale that he took her away to the seaside, telling her she should do nothing but lie on the beach and sketch all day; he would be major-domo, and would undertake all responsibilities. One Sunday night John Lester had arranged his plans. Rose had been too tired to play the organ or go to church in the afternoon, and John wrote to a neighbour to take his duty on the following Sunday.

He drove his sister across country to Galton in his dog-cart, taking easy stages. The East-Anglian coast is low and unpretending, often marshy and disagreeable, but at Galton—then a mere village with a small population, engaged, not in fishing or trade, but in purely inland

agricultural pursuits—the sea, unwatched by holiday-makers, rolled in from the German Ocean, and the wind blew keenly from the north, and a long, curving promontory formed a bay protected from the south-east. A band plays on Galton pier now in Summer evenings, and white villas are dotted about; London families, in which there are children too numerous for a man with a modest income to take far away from home, find it a pleasant holiday resort.

When the Lesters went there it was quiet enough, and Rose lay on the beach, as her brother had planned, sketching or idling, whilst he read aloud to her one of the half-dozen books he had brought with him, or made a pilgrimage to the adjacent farm-houses, in search of eggs, poultry, and vegetables for their table.

Often, as the brother and sister wandered, or sat side by side, John was on the point of asking Rose what was her opinion of Beauchamp Ashley, and what had passed between them, but he refrained, thinking she had better rest at present from all disquiet. Sometimes he fancied she was pre-occupied and absent, sometimes that she was silent and sad; but on the

whole, the parson's holiday was a pleasant one. The long, idle days on the shore were varied by excursions, and, though the neighbourhood was flat, there were some curious churches, tombs, and towers, and historic traces of Romans and Danes. The setting sun glowed upon rich pasture, and glossy, parti-coloured hides, grouped in effects that Cuyt and Cooper have made familiar to us. Beside the Broads grew waving reeds and whispering sedges; and upon the still water, mirroring the sky above, came clanging wild-fowl, feeding and diving and splashing in the evening shadows. By no means beautiful, but full of interest and suggestions for thought.

" Nothing is prominently likeable  
To vulgar eye, without a soul behind,  
Which, breaking surface, brings before the ball  
Of sight a beauty buried everywhere.  
If we have souls, know how to see and use,  
One place performs, like any other place,  
The proper service every place on earth  
Was framed to furnish men with."

The Lesters had souls behind their "learned and, therefore, loving eyes," and liked Galton, and drew from it rest for mind and body, and food for thought.

In her card-basket Rose found, on her return, two cards,—Mr. Beauchamp Ashley's and Mr. Edmund Barton's. She learned that Mr. Ashley had left Broadstone Park. Mr. Barton must be, she supposed, quite recovered, and able to return to his office in the Yards. Edmund had walked over to Stonefield, and found Rose absent; the servant said she was in town. He had had a walk of twelve miles, for he returned to Riverford on foot, but he was well, he was restless, and he must see her; the wish to see her had become an imperative necessity. As soon as office hours were ended, he started for London. Not till he arrived in Sussex Gardens, and stood on the doorstep of her home, did he know how weary he was; not till he had rung the bell did he remember that the hour was late, and that he had no excuse to offer for his visit. The servant answered his summons whilst he was collecting himself. He asked for Mr. Lester first. He was at dinner, the man said. And Mrs. Lester? She was dining out also. And Miss Lester? Oh! Miss Lester was at Galton-on-the-Sea, with Mr. John. Would the gentle-

man leave a message? No, the gentleman would not, he would call again.

He was too late to catch the midnight train back to Riverford, and he found himself obliged to wait on a hard bench all night, for the first train home in the morning, or to go to an hotel to sleep. He walked up and down for half-an-hour, debating the question with himself. Had it been possible to walk home—had the distance been but twelve or fifteen miles, he would have done so, certainly; but it was impossible to walk more than double that distance, unrested from the heavy day he had passed. He took the more prudent, if less Quixotic, course—jumped into a hansom cab. As he drove along, he determined where to go. Forteith was in London, he had rooms in Albemarle Street, he would go and see him in the morning.

Edmund fell asleep trying to think of many things, trying to still the restlessness that had taken possession of him; fell into the dreamless sleep of utter bodily exhaustion, from which he awoke late in the morning, but refreshed, and walked into Captain Forteith's rooms, as that gentleman poured out his first cup of coffee.

"You are a good fellow, Barton, to come and look me up like this, only you come too seldom. I believe it is but the second time you have been here. Sit down and eat. I think there is enough for both of us, unless you have a fancy for anything that is not here; if so, my man will get it. Not quite recovered your beauty, I see, but it will come right in time." (Ned suddenly thought with a pang, would she think him hopelessly disfigured?) "I do not know that it really matters much to a man whether he is good-looking or not; it depends a great deal on what are his objects in life. If mere drawing-room existence, he cannot be too handsome, let him be the Adonis, the 'look and die' of the Guards. Of course one knows the old saying of 'good personal appearance being the best letter of recommendation;' but that, as I take it, hardly means beauty. If to please the women be his object, to win some woman, then it must depend upon the taste of the individual woman. There was at one time a rage for ogres, and brutes of various degrees of forbidding minds and bodies, and there will still every now and then be found a woman who

prefers such; for my own part, I should class such a preference with that of the school-girl for slate pencils and sealing-wax, rather than for good bread and butter, and think it a morbid fancy. I know women like honourable scars sometimes, even when they are very unmistakeable, and I fancy a true woman says, in the humour of Benedick, if she have found the heart that suits her, 'his hair of what colour it please God;' and she may add, his general appearance too. So never mind your beauty. I heard from the River-fords about the fire at Broadstone. What an unfortunate thing! The house was very handsome, I have understood—the ceilings very fine."

"Yes, very; it is about the oldest in the county. Of course it has been added to and altered from time to time, and in various styles. The pictures were saved. It would have been a pity to have lost all those family portraits."

"But the luck was in your hands. It does not often happen to a man to be able to render another such a service as you rendered to Ashley—nor to save a woman's life, and get sufficiently marked and injured to make him inter-



esting, and not disagreeable. You came out quite a hero,"

"Don't be absurd. I am heartily glad to have done what I did, but it was not at all heroic—it was pure impulse."

"Call it what name you like," laughed Forteith, "the metaphysicians would say it was character—natural bent; you call it impulse. Hercules had such impulses, and we call him, even down to these days, a hero and a demi-god. But what shall we do with ourselves?—for you must stay a day or two, now I have caught you. I want to go down to the club for letters, and then we will take a turn in the Row."

"Yes, I have time for that, but I must be at home this evening."

"Must! Is that word to be taken in its fullest sense? But I see by your face one has no right to suppose a hero can speak other than truth, pure and simple. So if you must, you shall, reversing the words of my Scotch proverb, 'If you will you must.' I am inclined to think both readings are good sense, and many a man would have been a better and happier one, that felt the dignity of *must*, and the noble freedom of *will*."

Edmund's eyebrows were still bare, and his moustaches closely trimmed, for he had been more burned on the left side of his face; his whiskers, too, had been all shaven for the same reason, and were only just beginning to grow again. The passers-by looked at him as he went down the street, but few things attract much attention in London. When he went into the "Travellers," one or two men, knowing Forteith, looked at his companion with a contraction of the eyebrows common to observers, and wondered who the new-comer was, and in what foreign land he had met with the perils that had left traces so strong upon him.

The two men strolled up the Row talking, leaned over the railings, and watched horses and riders, Forteith speaking now and then to some one that he knew.

"By-the-by, how is your friend Miss—Miss Lester? She is in London, I suppose, just now?" Forteith was asking, when he perceived that he was speaking to unheeding ears.

Edmund was looking intently at two persons who were crossing the Row from the Knights-bridge side. They also appeared suddenly at-

tracted by him. As they gained the path on which he was walking, they looked at him scrutinizingly, spoke to each other, and then stopped, and the lady came forward with a smile and pretty hesitation.

"I think I can hardly be mistaken; surely you are Mr. Edmund Barton? I am right, Walter," she cried to her companion, "it is he!"

Walter Grant came up, and greetings and introductions were interchanged. Walter was inclined to talk, and Mrs. Grant was nervous in manner, changing colour repeatedly, and watching the expression of the gentlemen's faces; but Edmund was grave, and quiet, and showed neither pleasure nor pain at meeting again his old acquaintances. Zara looked at him with a curious interest; that which had been within the block was now evidenced without; careful and skilful workmanship had refined and perfected him; he seemed to her, in spite of his scars, to have grown more handsome, and to have increased in height—to have, in one word, though she did not use it, developed. To Fortieith, as he stood a little aside watching the group,

Edmund appeared to have become suddenly taller ; there was a grandeur about him he had never before remarked. Grant was handsome, intellectual-looking, refined in appearance, with a small, well-set head and bright eyes ; his figure was elegant, his clothes well made, and his feet and hands were perfect—he was unmistakeably a gentleman, but neither in moral nor mental capacity was he a great man ; whereas Barton, larger in person, and with less delicately moulded features and extremities, had the brows of reflective power, a firm mouth and earnest eyes, and the appearance of force and superiority. No one would in his case speak of birth or breeding, he was beyond them both, standing on his own individual height, in an isolation that almost always follows individuality—a high-souled, noble man.

Between these two men, looking now at one, now at the other, stood Zara, clothed in ruby silk and velvet jacket, that suited her graceful figure, and harmonized with her beautiful, ivory complexion and the lustre of her soft dark eyes. Remembrance grew strong upon her, and she almost unconsciously put her hand

through her husband's arm and rested upon it, whilst her colour deepened and her breath came fast.

"It is so very long since we have met, that it seems wonderful we should all remember each other," she said, wishing to say something; then recollecting that he was lying broken in heart and body when she had last seen him, she became still more confused, and hurried on. "Mr. Grant and I came over about six months ago. I like England so much. We did not think of finding you here—I mean not exactly here in London, we heard from my brother that you had returned to Europe; you know he and Papa are quite friends again? Is it not nice? Harry may come to England too; we want him to come. I suppose you hear from that dear old McLean sometimes? He was a delightful old savage. Are you not glad, though, to have left Australia and come home?"

"I shall be returning there shortly—at least probably I shall," answered Edmund, unable till then to return the least reply to her rapid sentences.

"Shall you indeed! I cannot understand

anyone going back there, when once safely away from it. Can you, Walter?"

But Walter thought the interview had already been sufficiently prolonged, and he was anxious to take leave.

"I am glad to have met you, Mr. Barton," he said, offering his hand in token of farewell, "and glad to see you looking—well," he was going to say, but he saw the seamed face and forbore to add the word. Then he turned to his wife. "We must be going on, Zara, I think."

"You will come and see us, will you not?" said Zara, "now you are in town. That is our address at present" (putting a card into his hand). "We should like to see you again, should we not, Walter?" with a flattering smile.

"Certainly, pray come and see us," said Mr. Grant.

"Thank you extremely," Edmund answered with a grave bow. "I am going into the country this afternoon; it will not be in my power to call upon you."

They shook hands and parted, and Zara

turned her head back over her shoulder, smiled, and waved her hand.

"I knew those people in Australia," said Edmund gravely, and without a change of voice or countenance, to Forteith, as they moved away together. "Mrs. Grant is very pretty."

"Very!" said Forteith shortly; and he thought to himself, "I wonder what made that woman choose the one man and leave the other! Barton is a king compared with him. Fool! it is just the old question of development; she was not great enough herself to reach up to his height; she did not want a king."

He asked no questions, but he understood in the main what had occurred in the past. What right had he to inquire into Barton's affairs? Nothing more was said about the Grants, but when the two men had driven down to the East Anglian station together, and were walking up and down the platform, talking of many things, Edmund said, *apropos* to nothing in their conversation, but following the links of a long chain of thoughts that had been flowing through his mind like an under-current,

"I often think we are as much indebted for our education, our improvement, to those who injure, grieve, or disappoint us, as to those who have always lent us a helping hand."

"Can there be a doubt of it? I could give you chapter and verse in confirmation of your idea if we had time, but here is your train coming up. The only point," pursued Forteith, leaning in at the window of the railway carriage, "is that we have to be a good way on in education and improvement before we have sense to know what the very words mean. It is just the recognizing of the Divinity that shapes all ends for good, if He give us faith enough to see that He must do all things well, and not thinking besottedly that our rough hewing is sufficient for us. Good-bye. Come and see me again soon."



## CHAPTER XIII.

**I**T was late in the afternoon when Edmund Barton returned to Riverford, too late for a visit to Stonefield, unless he should go there in the evening, after the Yards were closed. He resolved then to do first what work he should find necessary, and go to Stonefield or not, according to his impulse, when the requirements of duty were ended.

He quickened his pace as he arrived at this conclusion, and turned into the Yards alert and self-reliant. He nodded or spoke a kindly good-day to the workmen he met; and having changed his clothes for his grey working suit, he went into the office and settled rapidly various arrangements, gave orders, answered letters, and walked down to the wharf to see what barges had come in, and the load-

ing and unloading that was going forward. When the bell rang for the workmen to leave, and the gates to be closed, the time appeared to him to have gone fast. He turned round from the letter he was finishing as he heard the great gates creak on their hinges, and then close with a ponderous clang, and saw the clerk smoothing his hat as he waited with a heap of letters and papers before him for his final orders.

"The evening is fine, Victor wants a run, and I shall stroll over to Stonefield. But I must go across first and see Miss Blount. There are no more letters." He took his stick, put on his wide-awake hat, and whistled his dog.

From her wide parlour window Miss Blount had seen him coming, and opened the hall door for him as soon as he reached it.

"You have been in London I suppose, as I did not see you this morning? If you are not hurried there are two or three things I wish to say. I want you to see my tenant at Mill Cottage; the man who rents that garden ground ought to be told to put the hedges in order; they were not in a proper state when I drove by yesterday. Those people will at-

tend to you much better than they would to me, so I shall get you to see them both to-morrow. I will tell you presently, if you can wait." All the time Miss Blount was speaking she was proceeding by a retrograde movement through the hall, till she reached the door that opened through a small green-house into the walled garden at the back of the house, Ned following her. As she passed the drawing-room she pointed to it with a quaint gesture of her thumb over her right shoulder, and said in lower tones,

"I would take you in, but there is somebody there—somebody, you understand, that you don't want to see—somebody poor, in trouble—nothing to you. They will go away presently, and then I will send for you. I must see them; I cannot send people away."

Ned thought to himself Miss Blount had got one of her many *protégés*, leeches or cormorants, as the case might be; but he contented himself with returning a nod of comprehension to her nod of information, and said nothing.

"Go out into the garden, and walk round it twice—perhaps three times," she went on, "and

then I think I shall have done with my visitors. I might ask you in, but they are not people you want to see. Oh, and Rose is in the garden—I had forgotten that. Tell her not to come till I send for her; she won't want to see my company any more than you do, and there is no reason she should. I will send for you both."

She opened the garden door, gave Edmund a little push, and then shut him out; she smiled and nodded to him when he was outside, and retreated into the house.

He stood on the step a moment, trying to think. He had contemplated a long walk to Stonefield, and now he found the object of which he was in search here in his very presence. He could see the waving of her dress as she walked up and down by the bank of rhododendrons. His pulse was running riot, and he could hear the beating of his heart. He had intended to consider what he should say to her, and indeed had left it an open question whether he should that evening say anything at all; now the opportunity he had so long desired was presented to him, should he lose it and let it go in anger?

He smiled at his indecision, at his weakness, and wondered if it was a proof of cowardice—if it was the flaw, the faulty spot in his armour. Spurred by this last thought, he sprang quickly from the step into the garden, and went towards the solitary figure, whose violet dress made a charming contrast of colour against the dark polished leaves of rhododendron and laurel. She heard his footstep on the gravel, and turned to see whose it might be; she went towards him with a smile and an outstretched hand.

“I am so glad! I have been wishing to see you so much. I have heard of you, of course, but that is not at all the same thing.”

“Too frank, too easy and unconstrained,” he thought, “for her to have any deep regard, any inclination for me.” He felt ill at ease, could not collect his thoughts enough to make any remark, and became horribly self-conscious, remembering his scarred face and close-cropped hair. Would she observe it? he wondered, and would it make him disagreeable in her eyes?

Oh! she observed every slightest point about him. Her quick perceptions detected his troubled manner, and partly accounted for it.

She noted the rough grey suit that accorded so well with his complexion. She saw his large firm hand, that tightened its grasp upon the stick he carried; and she observed the scar upon his cheek, and the singed eyebrows, and her heart realized the nearness of the danger through which he had passed.

"I have been away at Galton with John," she said, thinking rightly that the best way to divert his thoughts from himself was to speak of her affairs. "In spite of its being little better than Winter, we enjoyed the sea very much. The place is not pretty, but I wanted a change. I have been nursing a young woman in our village, whom you were fortunate enough to rescue at Broadstone from the fire; she was very ill, and I could not leave her, and was rather over-tired, but I am quite well now. I found your card on my return from Galton. I have not been able to go and see your mother yet, but I shall do so soon."

"At Galton!—and I understood your servant to say you were gone to town, which I fancied meant London. I misunderstood the sound of the word. Your brother came to see me when

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I was laid up at Broadstone, and I have to thank you for a charming bunch of prim-roses."

"I am glad you liked them. John told me all about the fire, and the terrible accident, or I may say now the terrible escape you had. Poor Mrs. Durrant seems to have been frightened out of her senses; we have had some trouble in restoring them to her, though really one can hardly be surprised at such a result. I cannot imagine anything more alarming than fire; it seems to paralyse people's energies. Fortunately for Mr. Ashley and for Mrs. Durrant, yours were not paralysed."

"No, I was not paralysed, certainly, but I experienced the other effect produced—I felt as if I had the lives of a cat, and the strength of five men."

"But that is courage, not fear," she said, with a quick bright glance.

He smiled, and yet he said to himself, "If she only knew at this moment I am a coward! The precious minutes are flying past me, and I have spoken no word of what I desire to say. But how to say it?"

"I often wonder," Rose began, after some little silence, "what it is that makes one man courageous, and another cowardly. Men of the same class are brought up very much alike; their prejudices, their views, their ordinary modes of action are very much the same; but one smiles in the face of danger, and another shuns it—one turns red with a kind of fierce joy at the idea of peril to be surmounted, and another turns pale with fear."

"Ah! but you do not consider courage and cowardice are radical virtue and vice of character, and have nothing to do with education, or with force of opinion; though, of course, a timid boy is by training prevented from flying shamefully from danger. Education and public opinion will teach him self-control, and give him a prop on which to support his weakness; but the hero is one in grain, and the coward will show the white feather infallibly. I believe this the more because, in the case of women, no one can say their courage, their patient endurance, their tried moral courage, is the result either of education or of opinion—it is innate. I have seen a great many sorts of people, and I



believe I am right. Amongst schoolboys, on board ship, in the Bush, at the Diggings, it was always the same; one knew this man might be counted upon as ready and daring, and that one shunned as certain to fail."

"I believe you are right," Rose said; and then she added, in a tone of interest, "I have never heard the whole story of your life. I should like to do so. You must have seen and done many things quite unknown to most people."

"You would like to hear?" he said, and the colour came slowly into his cheek. "I have never had time to talk to you at any length; there have always been other people about us. I believe I find you alone to-day for the first time."

They were walking slowly up and down, she looking straight before her, or away across the fields, and he looking down at her. As he uttered his last words, a bell rang out from the steeple of Riverford church, then another, and another, till the air was filled with the sweet chiming. Then Rose stopped, and leaned against the open iron railing that divided the

garden from the fields beyond, which were much lower in level, and through which ran a little stream. The sunset glowed red and golden behind the church-tower and the surrounding trees. The bare branches were cut in fine, black, interlacing lines against the glowing sky, and the effect was heightened by the presence of a few tall firs, with their dark green foliage. The earth was already in shadow, only on the tops of the trees did any sunlight linger, and the glory in the sky increased, till almost every cloud was fringed with purple gold and red, a short-lived glory that, in half-an-hour, faded slowly, and passed entirely away.

Edmund had joined Rose, and was standing one step behind her, where she leaned against the fence, observing her, and incorporating her into the picture his eyes and heart were painting. The glory passed away, and left the scene grey and cold; the grass looked brown and rough, and the trees wild and bare, but still the sweet chiming of the bells went on.

“‘He being dead, yet speaketh,’” said Rose softly. “Does it not seem to you as if the voice

of the departed day still lingered ? Those bells make me think of a great soul passed from earth, but whose spirit remains, and still influences the world in his works." (He was listening with his heart, but he said nothing.) "How curiously sights and sounds affect one, and how long one remembers certain things. Margaret, my sister, writes me from India, and asks me if there are still the same sunsets over Riverford Meads, and behind Riverford church, and if the golden light shines through those little pillars that support the steeple on the tower, and if the bells ring in the evening with the clear, liquid sound, as if borne across a stretch of water. I think of her and my childhood always when there is such a sunset as we have just seen. Perhaps you would hardly think how closely woven into my life this place is ; there are particular sounds and smells in Riverford, unlike those of any other town, and this house and garden, full of quaint old furniture, heaps of fruit and flowers, and with that great ash-tree, is quite unlike all others. Aunt Hannah, too,—was there ever anyone more unique than Aunt Hannah?—so good, and so

crooked (if I may use such a word) in her goodness. By-the-by," and Rose turned quickly as she spoke, and looked at her companion, "are you going to stay with Auntie? Have you made up your mind yet? She told me you wanted——"

Something in his face and eyes arrested her words; she coloured very slightly, and turned away, conscious that he had been watching her intently.

"Did she tell you what I wanted?" he asked at once, speaking low, and with much emotion. "No, she could not, for I wanted *you* to decide for me whether I go or stay."

He drew close to her, and leaned his back against the railings, so as to face her. She stood quite still, with her eyes fixed upon the ground, only her eyelids quivered a little. She had been so calm and unconstrained in manner that he had feared she heeded him not at all, and was merely kind from the naturally generous impulses of her heart; he had almost made up his mind, as she went on speaking, to hide his affection from her, and live out his life as best he might without her; but inadvertently she had

given him his cue. "I must tell her or die," he thought.

"When Miss Blount proposed to me to remain with her," he said, speaking low and hurriedly, "I asked a week to consider the proposal. I wanted the week to seek you. It is a good deal more than a week since then, but I have sought you, and found you here, where I least expected it. She made the proposition to me the night of the fire at Broadstone Park. I have no earthly advantage to offer you, nothing I can plead with you. But still I love you,—do not be angry with me for that; and loving you, I do not know how I can remain in England and see you constantly. I do not see how I can live without you here—perhaps see you the wife of another man; for I have been told—forgive me for saying this—that you are attached to Beauchamp Ashley. I *know* he is attached to you."

"You have been misinformed," she said quietly, but with an effort.

He drew a step nearer to her, and went on: "I love you, and therefore from you only can I learn whether I shall stay here, or go back to Australia. If I go, I shall go trusting in, and

blessing you, thankful to have known you, to have called you friend, to have been capable of loving you, and you will fill, as you have ever done, the shrine of my heart. During the years I have been away, I ever held you best and worthiest, and I hid your remembrance in the recesses of my heart. Since I came home you yourself have filled the shrine; if I go abroad it will be closed again over its memories. I am not justified in thus speaking to you, feeling as I do how unworthy I am, but that once or twice you have uttered expressions that struck me. The very last time I was in this garden you said that you believed in me. One night at my mother's you said, and feelingly, that a woman would go willingly even to Australia with the man she loved. Forgive me if I have been presumptuous, and set too much store by, or have misunderstood, your words. I am, I believe, a modest man, and yet I did think often of what you said; and I dare to tell you now that as I cannot go without your dismissal, so I cannot stay without your love. You see it resolves itself, after all, into these few words: I love you. Were I to live for ever, had I a hun-

dred tongues, could I speak to you every hour in the year, every minute in the hour, I could but say the same: I love you."

She said nothing, and did not raise her eyes, but changed colour a little, and stretched out one hand to support herself against the railings. There was a crowd of conflicting feelings in her breast. To tell the truth, she had hoped, even supposed, that she had become dear to him; the attraction and sympathy between them she knew was great, but she had not expected him to speak now, and thus.

"I weary you," he said, in a tone of chagrin, observing her gesture; "you do not desire the responsibility of giving me an answer of any kind. I am sorry to have annoyed you; I will try to decide for myself. But I had hoped you would have let me talk to you as my friend—the first, too, who ever greatly helped me—even if you could not love me, Rose."

There was an accent of wounded pride as well as of passionate entreaty in his last words.

Her hand that sought to grasp the railings for support found itself clasped in his. Whether he thought she stretched it to him to bid him

cease speaking, or whether she meant him to take it, he being a fitter support for her than the railings—whether he went half-way to meet the groping hand, or how it was, they neither of them ever knew; but he held that hand within his own, and bending down towards her murmured “Rose.”

The church bells went on chiming over and around them, and from a waving poplar near the stream a thrush poured out his evening song, but they two spoke no other word. The first sound that broke the charmed silence was the clapping of Miss Blount’s hands at the garden door. It was her customary summons to her own family, and Rose, hearing, prepared instinctively to answer it. As she turned she encountered Edmund’s blue eyes fixed upon her in a long loving gaze.

“You do not know what you are doing,” he said. “My darling, my treasure! you must listen to much I have to say yet. I have no right to steal you thus; you must know all.”

“I know enough,” she said with a happy smile. “Come in.”

“Now, Rose,” began Miss Blount, as soon as



they entered the house, "what is to be done with you? James is gone, so he cannot drive you over to the Vicarage—you know I do not like disturbing him after he has gone home at night. But I can send one of the maids into the town for a fly."

But Rose stopped her. "Pray don't send, Auntie, I shall like the walk home, and John will probably come to meet me."

"And you, big tall fellow," said Miss Blount, turning to Edmund, "why don't you offer to escort her? If she wants to walk, I suppose she must. Rosie generally does as she likes, but she may as well be properly protected. So go home with her now, Edmund, before it is dark, and come back to me, we can do our business by candle light."

"I did not know," said Edmund with a blush of pleasure, "that you would allow me to walk home with Miss Lester, or I should have been too happy to offer her my escort."

"Not allow you! What do you mean? It is the proper thing to do. I should like to know what is the use of being a man, unless you can be of some use to other people? And

now, you improvident child, come into the dining-room, and have some wine—or would you like some tea?—before you start.”

Miss Blount stood on the door step and watched Rose and her companion as far as she could see them.

“Go by the field,” she had said, “it is much the shortest way, and you will meet fewer people; you will find the paths dry enough, after the winds we have had lately.”

She was trammelled by no conventionalities, she had her own views as to propriety and decorum, and they were strict ones, but she saw no breach of them in the attendance of this man upon her niece. Had anyone remarked upon it, she would probably have replied, “If he is not fit to be trusted to take care of my niece, all I can say is, he is not fit to be trusted with my business. In my opinion a gentleman and an honourable man are one and the same. If I consider a man such, I should as soon think of doubting his behaviour as I would of doubting my own father.”

Thus Miss Blount, like many other people, swore by all her gods. Rose and Edmund

walked by the field-path ; the evening was very still, and in the air was the feeling, the breath of the coming Spring.

“Will you listen to me now, my dearest?” Edmund said at last ; “sooner or later you must listen. Pray do not let there be misunderstandings between us, because matters are not perfectly explained. You are good enough to—to—let me love you, but you may not have taken into account what my life is, how very lowly placed I am, how small my means are, and you may find it impossible to return my love. For it is the next thing to impossible for a woman gently born, and highly cultivated, to descend in the social scale.”

She lifted her hand, as though to check his words, but he only drew closer to her, and once more began, “Rose——”

Then she turned towards him, and looking into his eager, earnest face, said with a frank smile,

“I know all I want to know.” Then fancying a shadow of annoyance crossed his face, she added, “It will be time enough by-and-by to talk of houses and land. I suppose they

have to be considered, but you are too anxious for my welfare in the worldly sense. Do not you know that the only real question between you and me, is—Is thy heart right with my heart? Only the soul can afford sustenance to the soul.”

“My Rose!” he said fondly, and took her hand in his, drew it through his arm and held it there. “Indeed my heart is right with thy heart. But—forgive me, people may say, your own family may say, I did not give you time for reflection, that I was presumptuous in aspiring to you, and offering to your acceptance the sharing of a lot so humble as mine. Be patient; I do not think they will influence your affection for me, but they may make you uneasy; at least you must give me the right to be the first to tell you of disadvantages and difficulties.”

“I know them all. I told you just now I know all I want to know. I can say no more than that.”

“But, Rose, your parents, your brothers may object to me. Your aunt, when she finds that I have won your affection, may say she will fill

up the manager's post with some one else."

"All possible—what then?"

"Then, darling, I should have no alternative but to return to Australia, and look after my flocks and herds again."

"That would not be so terrible; you would take me with you?"

"My own, own, perfect love! There is indeed no more to be said."

"You will have no more doubts about me then, or any questions as to worthiness or unworthiness? It is weeks ago since I told you I trusted you. I was rather alarmed after I had said it, lest you should think me too bold; but you were so modest that I was soon re-assured. *You did not trust me.*"

"I dared not; but now I shall utterly and for ever. So beware."

"Come in and see John now," Rose said, when they reached the Vicarage gate.

Edmund stood for a moment undecided, with his hand upon the gate.

"I am not inclined to spoil to-day by talking to anyone but yourself," he said. "I shall say nothing to your brother about the blessed

claim you have given me upon you. Let me have the perfect and single remembrance of you alone."

"Come in, nevertheless," she said, and he followed her.

But the Vicar was out, and if truth were told, Rose was somewhat relieved by his absence. She led the way into the drawing-room, which looked warm and was bright with flowers. Rose's piano was open, and her books were lying about—the whole room was full of her. They went and stood together by the fire, her head bent a little, and he looking at her in the mirror above the mantelpiece.

"I am glad I came in," he said softly; "till one gets amongst the realities of life again, one is hardly aware of one's rights and liabilities. I had scarcely realised till now that you are mine."

He drew her into his arms as he spoke, and kissed her fondly, but with a certain self-restraint, as if he held her sacred. He kept her close in his arms, and raised his head with a great sigh. Then he saw his image in the glass.

"I am such a big fellow, Rosie, and I am so ugly," he whispered with a rueful aspect, like a simple child.

She lifted her head, and looked at him smiling. She stretched her hands and drew his face down to her, and kissed the scars upon it one by one.

"You are not ugly," she said; "the scars are nearly gone. And I love you, ugly and scarred."

Then his self-restraint was gone, and he pressed her in a long, silent, passionate embrace.

## CHAPTER XIV.

EDMUND BARTON did not await the Vicar's return. With a happy heart and firm step he walked down the pathway, stood a moment at the gate, and turned to wave his hand to Rose, who watched him from the window, and then, drawing the lace curtains close, disappeared into the recesses of the house. He walked rapidly across the green, turned once more at the corner of the road where he could see the house for the last time, and as he passed into the lane, busied in fastening into his coat the cyclamen blossoms Rose had given him, he met Beauchamp Ashley returning to Broadstone.

The two men shook hands, and Beauchamp expressed his pleasure in seeing Barton well again—but he looked moody and uneasy. Then



he coloured high, and pointing to the flowers that Edmund wore, he said :

"It is a frightful impertinence, Barton, but you must excuse me. You have been at the Vicarage? Did Miss Lester give you those flowers?"

Edmund bowed in answer.

"I thank you. You will forgive my not delaying with you longer this evening. I am anxious to get home."

"Good night," said Edmund, holding out his hand.

"Good night," said Ashley, scarcely touching it; and then he passed quickly round the corner and was out of sight.

Edmund was too happy himself to feel anything like triumph over his rival—he was too well aware of the value of all he had won, not to know what must be its loss to another. Could he have avoided Ashley at this juncture, he would have done so, and he was very sorry to have occasioned him any pain. As he returned to the town, Lady Riverford's warning recurred to him. What could she have meant by bidding him not to indulge in dreams? Did she desire

a union between Miss Lester and Mr. Ashley? and did she think he, Edmund was likely to interfere with such an arrangement? Being undoubtedly an inferior *parti*, could she have wished him to have the generosity to retire from any contest? Well, it did not much matter now what she meant—Rose and he loved each other: that was the answer to every question, every difficulty, for the rest of his life. How such a strange and beautiful event had happened to him, he could not well say. He only repeated over and over again,

“Let no one ask me how it came to pass;  
It seems that I am happy—that to me  
A livelier emerald twinkles in the grass.”

He hastened his steps, and sighed out of a heart burdened with joy her beloved name, “Rose!”

“You are late, Edmund,” Miss Blount said, as she came out to meet him in the hall. “I was going to have the house shut up, and did not expect you again to-night. Never mind, come in. I often have late visitors, as you know. And first of all,” here she broke off, got up out of the chair in which she had just seated

herself, went to the door, looked out into the hall, carefully closed the door again with a bang, and came back to her chair. "I never wish my affairs to be canvassed outside," she said demurely, "and eavesdroppers invariably misrepresent matters, because they hear them imperfectly. So once more I begin. First of all, tell me have you made up your mind to be my manager? You have had a great deal more than a week to consider the question—time enough to think of your answer, risk your life, spoil your good looks, and run all sorts of foolish hazards. My father used to say he could not understand why a man could not be content to sleep in a whole skin, and so I say. What had you to do tearing across to Broadstone? You had better have been in your bed."

"Nonsense, Miss Blount, you do not in the least mean what you are saying. I could no more help going than you could help seeing your poor pensioners this afternoon; I was not a bit worse than you are. I gave what I had to give, and so do you—we only use a different coinage. I do not think your father spared his pains, or his purse, where he thought

either could do good, by all that I have heard."

"My father was a wealthy and a very generous man," said Miss Blount, bridling with the pleasure she always felt when anyone praised the father whom she idolized, and unable to resist this reference to wealth, which she greatly valued.

"He was more than that, he was a good and honourable man, and had a kind and noble heart," replied Edmund, who, being poor himself, yet having gained to-day the highest prize life could give him, could hardly be expected to put the same value upon wealth that Miss Blount did, who had been possessed of it all her days, and was yet a lonely soul. In spite of the difference of opinion that lurked in Edmund's words, and which Hannah Blount perfectly understood, she was gratified by the young man's tribute to her father's character, and was not inclined to take exception to its mode of expression.

"Well, well," she said, "I believe he was all and everything that is best; but let us get to business. Have you made up your mind to go

or stay? I want you to stay, of course."

"Honestly, then, I am no nearer the mark than I was. I cannot give you an answer without asking you a question, or rather laying before you a new complication of my affairs. There is no use in deferring what I have to say, or seeking a favourable opportunity for telling you, that I love Miss Lester."

Miss Blount jumped out of her chair straight on to her feet, and stared at the speaker; then she seated herself again, leaned her head against the high back, and ransacked her pocket and her velvet bag for her snuff-box without speaking a word. Edmund handed her the box from the little table, she took one huge pinch, and then a second, looking him gravely in the face as he stood with the box in his hand.

"I am not very much surprised," she said at last, "and I do not know that I have any objection to make. But what my brother Lester will say, and what sort of a wiggling I shall get, remains to be seen." And then she burst into a long fit of subdued laughter, that shook her tall figure from head to foot.

"Give me that box, and go and sit down ; don't stand there like a great donkey, as if you were afraid, and waiting for my last gasp. It won't kill me, if I had twenty nieces for you to fall in love with, and twenty brothers-in-law to get in a rage."

Again she indulged in a fit of laughing, looking at Edmund all the time as if he inspired her mirth. For some time he preserved his gravity, but at last the contagion was irresistible, and he laughed too ; then she recovered herself.

"I am glad for your sake to see you laugh," she said, "because now I know that you are not going to wear the willow, at any rate, nor do you want me to plead your cause with Rose, which I would not have done. I thought at first your answer to me was depending on her favourable answer to you. But Rose has given a favourable answer, has she?"

"Yes. I told her to-day that I loved her, and she is good enough to return my love."

"Well, I don't see why it should not be you. I daresay you are quite as good as any other of your sex, and personally, as I happen to want

you, I had rather she married you than any other man. It would be delightful to me that one of my sister's children should be concerned in their grandfather's business. So far as I have any voice in the matter, you have my consent to marry Rose, as the child is fool enough to trust you, and wish to marry at all. But I cannot say a word about her parents ; you will have trouble with her father. I daresay he thinks his daughter might marry an Earl and he will take exception to your means, and your family, and your occupation ; he would not bring up either of his sons to business. For my own part I hate pride." And Miss Blount took another pinch of snuff, which operation materially helped her in the ironical twist of nose and mouth.

Miss Blount, like all prejudiced people, hated every opinion or form of character different from her own.

"I am quite aware of my disabilities and imperfections, and I know how very much I am asking of her parents in wishing Rose to share my lot ; but she herself is content to do so—to her only do I look for the ultimate Yes or No.

But there is one point involved on which my answer to you depends, that, if we cannot remain happily in this country, she volunteered to go to Australia with me. If she is thus minded, you will easily understand that I am not inclined to act with a romantic, I must call it mistaken, generosity, and give her up. If she thinks I can make her happy—and God knows I will try—I am not going to contradict her. So, you see, I cannot give you the decided answer I otherwise would have done until I have seen Mr. Lester. I will not live here without her. You shall know the result as soon as I know it.”

“Well, I hope you will remain, but I cannot tell what a man like Mr. Lester may say or do. I do not understand you men at all. You act upon impulse, and, feeling a great deal more than we do, you have quite as many vanities and jealousies and ill-tempers and littlenesses as we have. I never did understand any man but my father, he acted always on a broad principle. I have tried to copy him. I am not asking you whether I have succeeded. I know what I think, and you have nothing to do with



it, but you are the least unlike him of any man I know."

"In spite of my running risks, and burning my face and whiskers, and not caring much about a whole skin, eh?" laughed he.

"I did not mean that my father was a coward," she said, with indignant eyes. "He fought the up-hill fight of his early life too well for anyone to suppose him a coward. Did you ever hear that in the cholera year he nursed, when no one in the village would go near them, a family attacked by the disease? Did you know that he plunged into the canal after a bargeman's child that fell overboard? No, you were no coward, John Blount," she said, lifting wet eyes to his picture, and clasping her hands across her breast.

"Dear Miss Blount, I never supposed he was. I have heard both those stories and many others of him, and I honour him as a good and noble man. I do not forget that Rose Lester is his grandchild."

"Go and do thou likewise," said Miss Blount, gravely bowing her head; and after a little silence she added, "I shall not talk of business

to-night, my thoughts are pre-occupied. See Mr. Lester as soon as you can, and let me have your answer. I have hopes of you, Edmund, and I am in the mood that, if you should decide to go abroad, I shall consider about selling the Yards."

Edmund and Rose, had they thought about the matter, would have said that they had walked across the fields quite alone, and had met no one; but a pair of eyes belonging to no less a person than Gilbert Drake, who had not yet left Riverford, had spied them out. To such good account did their owner put their observation that, meeting John Lester on the Riverford road, he checked his horse and stopped to speak to the Vicar on some trifling pretence.

"Mr. Barton appears to be quite recovered from his injuries at Broadstone," said Drake, with something between a smile and a sneer, flipping his horse's ears as he spoke, but not riding forward. "I heard he had been terribly burned—not that I take much interest in the gentleman; he repaid the trouble and kindness I took for him as a lad with very scurvy words

and deeds. I lent him money once—which your sister repaid, by-the-by. He has been made a great deal of, though I cannot tell why; I don't know that it matters, as I am leaving these parts shortly. But he's about again. I saw him a quarter of an hour ago, walking across the fields with Miss Lester. They struck me as mightily taken up with each other," he added maliciously, as he saw the Vicar start at his sister's name, and an angry flush come into his cheek; "but I suppose that's all right, for they're a handsome pair at any rate, though he is too big for my fancy; they'll make as handsome a couple as his father and mother did. I hope you are pleased with the match, Mr. Lester. The young lady had to decide, they say, between Mr. Barton and Mr. Ashley, but she's none the worse for considering such a matter well; there's no good in being in a hurry. But I must be riding home, and shall wish you good evening."

He struck his horse with whip and spur as he spoke, and prevented the possibility of the Vicar making any remark to his communications, full of coarse and calculated impertinence.

The Vicar stood quite still in the road, and pushed up his slouched hat to rub his forehead, feeling greatly puzzled and annoyed. He would have dearly liked to swear a good round oath aloud, and so relieved his mind. He had been calling in Riverford on Mr. Merivale the Rector, and in the course of conversation some mention was made of the fire at Broadstone—in the country such matters are long remembered—and of Barton's gallantry; and then the Rector spoke of the castigation Drake had received at Barton's hands, expressing his surprise that such a good-hearted, well-disposed man as Barton appeared to be, should have made so implacable an enemy as Drake; for though Drake in words insulted Miss Lester, he really intended to annoy Barton, and Mr. Merivale, clergyman as he was, could not help thinking the punishment was well deserved.

"I have never talked about the matter, Mr. Lester, you may be sure, but there were other people present who would not be so reticent," Mr. Merivale said. "I wonder the story has not reached your ears before; these things seem to be borne on wings of wind, not to be actually

repeated, and they gather bulk as they come. I am sorry I should have been the person to inform you, however. I would not willingly have annoyed you."

"I am annoyed, certainly—but that is natural. However, I am not surprised that I hear it now for the first time. The parties most concerned in any report are always the last to be informed of it. I cannot help being vexed for my sister, for with the best and kindest heart Rose does things that evil-minded people might twist to her disadvantage. My aunt, too, has her peculiarities, and such things are visited on the next generation."

The Vicar was a proud man, and was wounded. How much more distressed, then, was he at the remarks made by Drake! He was angry, and he was deeply hurt; even if the whole matter could be explained, he was, as it seems natural to the haughty independence of the English character to be, annoyed at being made a common subject of discussion to his neighbours, and unable to hide himself and his affairs from their impertinent gaze.

## CHAPTER XV.

JOHN LESTER hurried to the Vicarage in a very uneasy state of mind. He entered the house and looked sharply round the hall for other hats and sticks than his own, that would give evidence of some masculine visitor, but there were none such to be seen. Somewhat relieved from his first sensation of annoyance, he went into the drawing-room, which he found empty; the fire was made up and burned brightly, and Rose's chair was drawn in front of it. Then he opened the dining-room door and looked in; that, also, was empty, but the table was spread for dinner, and two covers only were laid. Everything betokened quiet order and expectation, the work of the day was ended and cleared away.

The Vicar went to prepare for dinner. As

he came down Rose met him at the foot of the stairs. He noticed that she was wearing a pretty dress, of pink cashmere, trimmed with black lace and velvet, that suited her, and combined with the smile that hovered on her lips, and with her calm brows, to give her a gayer appearance than she had worn for some time. Perhaps he only fancied it, but she seemed more like the bright young sister of earlier years, whatever were the cause; and the fancy rather increased his annoyance that anyone should have dared to talk of her.

John Lester was right in his instinctive observation of these signs of dress and appearance. Rose had looked at the dark dress she had worn all the Winter evenings, and did not like it; she laid it aside, and put on the soft pink dress, as according better with her state of feeling.

“Were you at Riverford to-day?” the Vicar began, after dinner was over. “I thought you must have been, by the violets in your dress. No one else has such violets as Aunt Hannah. I think we ought to get some; will you remember to ask for them, if I forget?”

“We have got some already; another year

we shall have plenty, I hope. If you go down to the corner, near the churchyard, you will find some. But I always bring a bunch from Auntie's; her garden always seems to have better soil than, and not to be so much disturbed as, other people's."

"Did you walk home? Were you tired? Or when did you come?"

"Yes, I walked home. Mr. Barton came with me. I have returned more than an hour now, and I am not at all tired, thanks," said Rose, smiling, and looking up from the orange she was peeling. "But you must be; you are so much later than usual."

"I was detained in the town," said the Vicar, answering the smile with a frown. "Barton was with you—was he? Rose, what does it mean?" he continued, pushing his plate from him, and turning his chair to the fire, so that he might not face her. "I have never been able to ask you yet, but, after something I heard to-day, I must ask. I had a visit the other day from Mr. Ashley; he begged my good offices with you on behalf of his son. I told him you had never mentioned him to me, and that I had



never intruded upon your confidence. I do not want to force you now to tell me anything that is disagreeable to you" (for he saw the colour rise in her cheek), "but to-day I have been annoyed, and I should like to talk to you, if you will not take offence. Do you know much of the Bartons? I know you are intimate with Julia; but do you know them well as a family? Do you know much of Edmund Barton? Is he a bad-tempered man? Or do you know much to his disadvantage?"

"Bad-tempered he certainly is not. It appears to me that we all know a good deal to his advantage. Lately, he has especially distinguished himself, to say nothing of the opinion Aunt Hannah holds of him, in wishing him to remain with her as manager."

"H'm!" (At the moment, the Vicar wished Aunt Hannah had no need of managers.) "That is true," he said at last; "but I want to know your views. I had better tell you why, perhaps."

Then he told her the conversation he had had with Mr. Merivale. Rose's heart beat, and her cheek kindled with pleasure at hearing of

her lover's summary vengeance ; but when Mr. Lester added the remarks made to him by Drake, she turned pale.

"I do not know why Mr. Drake hates me—hates us," she said, "but I feel that he does. I never intentionally offended him."

"I dislike questioning you, Rose, but did you ever lend Barton money?"

"I paid, many years ago, some money that he owed, and he repaid it to me," she answered in a low voice, and with bent head. "I cannot think, however, what right anyone had to suppose this was the case, for I never mentioned it; and I do not know how Mr. Drake could have dared to repeat the matter."

"People do repeat things, Rose. I must say, I think it was an imprudent thing for you to do. Women—especially young women—cannot afford to do Quixotic kindnesses,—for I am not doubting for a moment your kindness and generosity,"

Rose smiled.

"I do not agree with you. I think people can always afford to do what is right, and that includes what is kind. I would do the same

again to-morrow, even if it entailed similar annoyance."

"Believe me, you are wrong, Rose. I said *women* could not afford to do generous acts regardless of consequences."

"And I will not accept any distinction of persons," she said, still smiling; "what is right, is right. I am, however, much vexed that you should have been annoyed, although it is only a momentary annoyance. Such a man as Mr. Drake can never have any real weight in the opinion of worthy people, and he has, by what you have said, been overdoing his part. I was annoyed for a moment, for you, and for Mr. Barton, but, on a little reflection, what does it matter? It is not worth speaking of further. How could he understand my motives?"

But the Vicar was not convinced, and was still anxious.

"I cannot comprehend Barton asking such a favour of you."

"Can you not? He was poor, and I was not; he was in difficulties, and just starting for Australia. I am glad to have been able to help him."

The Vicar was losing his patience. He pushed back his chair, uncrossed, and then recrossed, his legs, and faced round upon his sister.

"I am sure I do not see any reason for your taking so much interest in this man, although, I admit, he is a brave fellow, and his mother is our mother's oldest friend. If you stand up for people so warmly, and put yourself out of your way to do them kindnesses, you cannot expect anything but comments—civil or uncivil, as the case may be. There is no reason, because Mrs. Barton is a lady, and our mother's friend, and that Aunt Hannah employs her son, that you should be on terms of intimacy with that son."

"No—so far I agree with you ; but you do not seem to understand that I like him for himself—that I was glad to help him, because it pleased me to do so—that I have not changed my opinion of him formed years ago, except in the fact that he has justified my regard for him. I had better tell you, John," she said, rising and leaning against the mantelpiece, whilst a smile and a blush played over her face, "that Edmund

Barton and I love each other. He told me so to-day."

"Good heavens!" cried Mr. Lester, "that is news indeed! What on earth was he thinking of? You must see, Rose, how impossible it is that any of your family could consent to your marrying him."

"That is unfortunate," answered Rose, quietly; "he suits me, and I suppose I shall marry him some day. I am sorry you dislike it."

"Dislike is not the word. I must see Barton to-morrow, and my father; this must be prevented. If you have not sense to protect yourself from an adventurer, we must interfere. You could not possibly live at Riverford with him. Forgive my saying, too, that I had thought you were greatly pleased with Beauchamp Ashley—was it not so?"

"Yes, certainly it was. But perhaps you may not remember that some years ago, when Mr. Ashley used to come to Sussex Gardens, you and James took the pains to warn me against him. I was quite young then, and was very much occupied with him, and might probably

easily have passed over many faults of character—at that time he seemed to me perfect. You first drew my attention to the worldliness of his character; you pointed out that his intentions towards me were not serious, and that he was only amusing himself at my expense. You put me on my guard, and I observed him closely. Dear as he was growing to me, delightful as was his companionship, much as our intellects accorded mentally, morally, artistically, I began to understand that he had set the world, the things of the world, fame, fortune, position, before him as the supreme end and aim of life. I saw his sister, and knew what her influence with him must be. I heard of Miss Brabazon, and I was saved from my own false estimate of suitability and sympathy. Not long ago he asked me to be his wife—do not mention this to anyone, John, for I refused him. Under sudden impulse he turned from his false gods to things better and nobler; but his is not a strong and resisting nature. I do not feel sure that he may not return to his old faiths; besides, he left me so long unheeded, unsought, that I was cured of my vain fancies, and also of my pain—pain

caused by wounded pride and disappointment ; for I do not mind confessing to you that I was disappointed, that I who cared for and thought of him should have made so little difference to him that he could pass many weeks without me. Do not mistake me, however ; the sympathy between us was very strong, our regard for each other was true enough, but it was not the whole truth ; we met at certain points only. I understand it all now—we did not really and perfectly suit each other. It is all very well for people to say that a woman should love once and for ever : it depends on what they mean by love. I can only answer to such a saying, that, if they are right, I did not love Mr. Ashley ; and if I did not love him, neither did he really love me. Love to be love must be mutual—must be equal. Don't laugh at me, John," she said, suddenly aware of her eager tones, and laying her hand gently upon him, and looking at him with dewy eyes. "I have arrived at this knowledge, because I have lived and loved."

"I am not laughing at you, my dear," he replied, somewhat crossly, as is the wont of many Englishmen when they are touched by any

emotion; "what you have said is true in the main, though I have not passed through the phases. I understand a little more of your life, too, and see that this lesson of yours was being learned when you first came here to me. I don't want to grieve you, Rosie; but still you must see that we cannot like you to marry Barton and live at Riverford—for I suppose he contemplates remaining there."

"I am sorry for that," said Rose, gently, and taking her hand from his shoulder, "because, in that case, as I do not wish to annoy any of you, I shall go with him to Australia."

"There is an end of the matter indeed!" said the Vicar, rising hastily. "I will see my father to-morrow. You and I will not discuss the question further."

The blood rushed over Rose's throat and brows.

"Pray see my father, John. I have already written to him; but you forget that I am a woman, not a child. I have already decided."

Rose drank her tea alone in the drawing-room, and the Vicar spent the evening in his study.



"I am going over to Riverford this morning, John," Rose said, when she met her brother at breakfast. "I want to see auntie."

"I am going too," said Mr. Lester, not quite recovered from his crossness. "I can drive you in, if you like, and leave you there, for I am going up to town at noon. I can either call for you again, or you can stay away all night—as you please."

"We can settle about that; but I shall be glad for you to drive me, as I want to take my riding-habit. I have not had a ride for a long time, and I mean to ride to-day. The grey will be so glad to see me!"

"I suppose he will," thought the Vicar," and some one else too," but he said nothing, and ate his breakfast in silence, making an unusually good one, and devouring almost all the hot loaf, as cross people are apt to do.

"I am going for a ride, auntie, on the grey," cried Rose, presenting herself at Miss Blount's bed-room door, and knocking for admittance; "it is 'a nice brown day,' as you call it."

"Come in and let me look at you," answered Miss Blount, unlocking the door and admitting

her niece. "Where does my pretty want to go?" she asked, kissing Rose affectionately, "and when will she be back? will she dine with her old aunt? and how did she get here so early? But stay, dear, a minute, and I will put away my writing-case and come down stairs with you. I never leave papers about for the servants to read, and I ought to have done some business last night, but other things intervened."

"What do you mean, auntie? what are you smiling for? Is there anything the matter with me? You don't mean to say," she cried, with an inspiration of the truth, "that he told you last night?"

"Who is *he*? and what had *he* to tell? you bad child! What have you been doing? and what am I to say to your father and mother?"

"Did he tell you, and what did you say? You know very well you will all have to say Yes, or I shall go to Australia."

Then Miss Blount looked grave, and took Rose by the hand, shutting the drawing-room door behind them.

"There is no need," she said, "for everyone

to overhear us. Don't talk nonsense of going away, you would break your mother's heart, Margaret in India, and you in Australia! But this man, what is he so much to you that he must come in and alter all our lives? How is it you are to think of him before everyone else, his wish and pleasure before ours? What has he done so worthy? What has he to plead with, or to offer you?"

"I can only give the old answer to your old question, auntie. He is all the world to me. We love each other. I am doing no more for him than my mother did for my father; only," and she gave a sly look at her aunt, "you happen to like Edmund, and you did not particularly like Papa, you know."

"Well, I suppose it is natural, and I suppose it cannot be helped, but of course I shall get in to trouble, because I have had the young man here, and trusted him so much. The burden of all sorts of difficulties comes upon me. When James was run away with by the black colt, of course it was my fault for letting him ride it. When John fell out of the swing in the loft and broke his collar-bone, it was I ought not to

have let him be always with the groom. I don't think Margaret ever got me into trouble," said Miss Blount, musingly, and taking a tiny pinch of snuff, "but you—dear me! I forget all your scrapes, but you made up for her. You went to the fair with James and his wife without asking leave; you climbed into the plum-tree, and tore your white frock; you made Farmer Blyth give you a ride on the old cart-horse, and kicked the animal with your little heels so that he bolted out of the farm-gates with you screaming with laughter on his back; and the Rector and his family saw you, and I had only left you with Mr. Blyth for a few minutes whilst I went to see old Miss Crush. Ah! I did not hear the end of that for a long time. You tumbled out of the barge into the canal once, only I was not there, your father took you that day, and I was not told of the accident till long afterwards. You came safely out of all those scrapes, but out of this one you'll never get till you die, Rose. Have you thought of that?"

"If it be no scrape, but only the one true joy and gladness of life, I do not wish and I do not expect to get out of it then," said Rose. "You

and I will not talk about this. You like him very much, and you will like me to live near you, and come and plague you sometimes. You know you will not get so good a manager elsewhere."

"Are you going to ride with Edmund Barton? for here he comes with your brother? Had you not better go and dress, Rose?"

"No, I am going to stay for a few minutes, because John is not to say that he did not know I was going to ride with Edmund."

The Vicar was looking cross and sullen. When he had left his sister at Miss Blount's door, he walked across to the Yards, but Mr. Barton was already gone out, the clerk said, and asked would Mr. Lester wait? Mr. Lester did wait some half an hour, got weary of it, left word that he wished particularly to see Mr. Barton that day, and that he would call on him again on his return from London, in the afternoon; then he walked back through the fields towards Miss Blount's, and at the door met the man he had been seeking.

"I have just been to the Yards to see you, Mr. Barton," the Vicar said, shaking hands very

coldly, and speaking in a constrained voice. "I want half an hour's conversation with you."

"With pleasure," answered Barton courteously. "I have some business with Miss Blount which I must attend to; after that I am quite at your service. I intended coming over to Stonefield to-day."

"I must go to London to see my father and mother by the next train, so I will not detain you now if you have business with my aunt, but will call upon you on my return."

"Whatever is agreeable to yourself," said Barton, springing up the steps and ringing the bell at the house.

"Cool!" said the Vicar to himself; "by Jove! the man feels he is master of the situation."

"Are you sure he is not so?" said himself to the Vicar; and the question was not pleasant.

Miss Blount was standing in her drawing-room when the two gentlemen entered, her tall figure drawn to its full height, and she straightened the folds in the front of her black satin dress with her long, nervous hand.

"I am glad to see you both together," she began, after shaking hands with them. "I have

been expecting you, Mr. Barton, and this child wants you to ride with her to-day. Give me an hour first whilst she is dressing, and then be off whilst the day is young. You can ride James's horse, I suppose ?”

The gallant old woman had gone into action, and faced the enemy. The Vicar was dumb-founded. He frowned, and flushed deeply.

“You will excuse me, Aunt Hannah, but surely it will be a great indiscretion for Rose to ride out with Mr. Barton, before her parents are acquainted with his pretensions ? I am not at all prepared to say that their answer will be favourable. For my own part, while acknowledging the honour Mr. Barton has done my sister” (the Vicar bowed, but his smile was somewhat ironical, Barton fancied, though no irony could matter to him if Rose's sweet eyes rested on him approvingly as they did now, and if her hand did not loose its hold), “I do not know what position he has to offer her. These are rather awkward matters to argue in your presence, my dear Rose, and I would have spared you them. You can leave us now, if you please. (Rose shook her head and smiled at her lover.) Very

well, just as you like, only I have not sought this discussion. Naturally I must wish to see my sister properly provided for, and placed in the position to which she is entitled by birth and education. I have not a word to say against Mr. Barton personally; I believe him to be a gentleman and an honourable man, I know him to be a brave one, but he must excuse me when I say, I do not know what are his means, or even what home he can offer my sister. He will not be offended when I say he is not the man I should have chosen for her."

"I am not in the least offended, but it does not appear to me that Mr. Lester has the right to choose. If Miss Lester is satisfied with me I think the rest of the world must be content with her choice. I will go into particulars of my new plans, for I have made some, my probable source of income as Miss Blount's manager, or the certain emolument I should receive at once on my return to Australia, to say nothing about the fact that I have cattle of my own there that are an unfailing source of wealth. I believe I am a better man of business, and more provident, than Mr. Lester gives me credit for being, judging, as



he probably does, by my own antecedents and those of my family. Miss Lester did me the honour yesterday," he turned his dark blue eyes upon her with an expression of trustful affection, "to say she was acquainted with my affairs as far as she desired to be."

The look of the blue eyes was returned in full by the brown ones, but Rose said nothing—she was sitting in a low chair with her hat on her knee, still and unruffled.

"I do not know why my opinion in so weighty a matter should be overlooked," interposed Miss Blount. "I do not want Rose to marry at all; I have no such good opinion of any of you; I never married myself. But if she likes Edmund, and is content to take matrimonial troubles, I have proved my regard for him already."

"Mr. Barton has, however, not taken into account one thing," persisted the Vicar, taking no notice of Miss Blount's remarks. "I will grant that he is himself an eligible man, that his income and position are satisfactory. I think he has overlooked the fact that my sister has money of her own—that on my father's and mother's death she will be in possession of a con-

siderable fortune—that her family might therefore look for a higher match for her than that of a man in business, whether as a timber-merchant or a cattle-dealer.”

The Vicar was decidedly cross, and looked triumphant. Edmund Barton turned a little pale.

“Yes, indeed,” he said slowly and sadly, “I had overlooked that fact. It had never occurred to me that I was wooing a rich wife; there are some things that a poor man, an adventurer, as I may perhaps be called” (the Vicar winced), “must not do. *Noblesse oblige*. My sweet Rose, I wish you were not wealthy; you would not like me to be stigmatized as a fortune-hunter, and, poor as I am, I am so proud that I would rather live without your love than commit so gross a breach of honour as to induce you to join your lot to my less fortunate and precarious one.”

“You would not rather do anything of the sort,” Rose said, speaking for the first time; “do not say words that are ridiculous and untrue. Love is greater than honour, generosity, pride, poverty, wealth, because it contains

all other good things; it is all-sufficient—the one answer to every question, the one solution of every difficulty. Love is enough!”

She had risen, and had laid her hand upon his arm. He looked down into the earnest, pleading face. He did not kiss her, but he took her hand into his own and held it fast.

“I believe, Mr. Lester,” he said, “that she has spoken God’s own truth, and that I was talking utter nonsense.”

The Vicar beat his foot upon the floor.

“Well, I must see my father to-day, and I shall miss this train if I do not go directly. I shall return here this evening.”

He made no farewells, but hurriedly left the house, provoked and discomfited, and walked at a rapid pace into the town, with his hat low on his brow, and his long-skirted coat flapping round him, and he muttered to himself as he went. Was it possible that these two fools had found the precious pearl that he had never known how to seek for, whose very existence he had perhaps doubted, and whose discovery, if it were so blessed a one, might never be vouchsafed to him?

"I must have some cake for the grey, to-day, auntie, bread is not good enough," Rose said, as she stood on the steps and watched her pretty horse led round from the stables.

The animal lifted his beautiful head when he heard his mistress's voice, and whinnied low, his large, soft eyes filling with pleasure when he saw her. He rubbed his velvet nose against her shoulder, nibbling at the sleeve of her jacket like a rabbit; he bent his head to his knee, pawing the gravel, and sniffing at her clothes.

"Them critturs a'most speaks," old James said, looking at the grey with mingled affection and surprise, as a grandfather might do at some precocious grandson. "Leastways, that one do; he's as many ways of his own as a Christian. He's as proud as can be to see you, Miss Rose; and you not on his back these months past, you'll find him a bit fresh, I doubt; but he'll find his manners."

"Will your lordship be satisfied with that?" Miss Blount asked, bringing out her silver basket full of cake; a piece of which Rose presented to the horse, who ate it gravely.

Edmund lifted Rose to her saddle, and the

grey sidled, curveted, waltzed as soon as he felt her weight upon him. It was some time before he "found his manners," as James called it; for after they had ridden out of the gates, and as far as Miss Blount could see (and she stood looking after them a long time, with her large pocket-handkerchief tied over her head), there was the grey, still in the wildest excitement, making marvellous bounds and twists. Edmund's bay mount doubtless told his stable companion, on their return, that such conduct was highly ridiculous; and the grey, in the superiority of his youth, probably responded, it was all very well to be steady when one got old: in the meantime, his mistress did not object to his amusing himself.

Not till the riders reached Lord Riverford's mills, where they could breathe their horses in a long canter over the green common-land stretching the whole length of the lane, did the grey become reduced to something like order. Edmund asked, as they flew along:

"Where are we going, love? I did not ask before we started."

"To High-beeches," she said, "to see your mother, of course."

"Always good and kind!" And he smiled with the pleasure of the exercise, and the happiness of being with her alone.

"I have brought her to you, mother,—Rose, my wife to be," cried Edmund, springing from his horse at the gate of Wood Cottage, and walking beside the grey as Rose rode in.

How Mrs. Barton welcomed Rose need not be told. That Edith laughed and cried in turn, no one will be surprised to learn.

"Do you remember, Edmund," Mrs. Barton said, as she kissed Rose, "you told me, many years ago, if it were possible, you would like to win this girl?"

"I do recollect, but I never thought it possible, and yet it has come to pass. Goethe says, 'Beware of what you wish for.' For a long time I did not wish at all, I thought everything was against me—that my lot was evil—that my mind—my body were so ill-contrived, there was no good to be done with them, and yet—— But I was not worthy of her then—not ready for her. My old friend,

McLean, says that development and perfection depend upon the work—the chiselling bestowed upon the stone. I wanted much, and got, some rough handling. As I have won her, I suppose it has done me good.”

“The truth is, Rose, he has loved you all his life, whatever may have been the difficulties that beset his path—whatever obstacles he has had to surmount.”

“If the distance is not too great for you, mother, I want Rose to see the Warrens,” Edmund proposed. “I daresay my tenant will admit us. She has only seen the house outside. Perhaps it may be her home some day. Who knows?”

The happy day wore itself out, the sun sank low, the horses were ordered, and, through the rides of Riverford Park, lover and beloved rode slowly home, listening to the song of thrush and blackbird that balanced themselves on boughs with swelling buds, watching the red glory in the west, the long shadows on the grass, the squirrel that sprang from tree to tree, and crushing under their horses’ hoofs white and purple violets, and primroses nestled in the thick grass.

They talked in sweet undertones of those

many things about which the heart of man is ever busy, but rarely speaks, except to the counterpart, the other heart that with itself makes one perfect whole—and they kept the charmed silence, more eloquent still than speech, for all is understood, and needs no further discussion. And the glad world around them seemed bathed in “the light that never shone on sea or shore.”



## CHAPTER XVI.

AS Edmund and Rose turned into the Riverford Road, she checked the long, stretching canter of the grey, and looking at her lover, half in pride and half in sudden alarm, broke the long silence that had reigned between them by asking,

“There is one thing, Edmund, that occurs to me : what are you going to do about your mother ? She may feel, and somewhat justly, that your first duty is to her—that you should provide for her, and not for a wife—that you should work for your sisters, and not for me, and prevent their being obliged to earn their livelihood. Had you thought of this ?”

“I believe I had thought of everything, but I love you for thinking of it. Be content, however, darling. I spoke to my mother on this

very subject when you were out with Edith. She was quietly and usefully brought up, in spite of her being a beauty, and she does not consider it any hardship for the girls to be at work for themselves, though of course I can help them sometimes, and make their home more comfortable. My mother does not wish for a larger house than the cottage, and she thinks women that are obliged to work are happier for it—she knows it does not make them less gentlewomen, though it may keep them from living in the great world. And it does not fall to the lot of all women to marry ; it is, therefore, far better that they should have some employment. She is only too happy that I can make a home for myself. As for Julia, *you* ought to know her well enough to be sure that she is too proud to stand in the way of my happiness, and too fond of yourself to say or do anything that should keep you from being her very sister.”

“Yes, perhaps ; but still—Is it very selfish of us ?”

“Be satisfied, dear one. I believe I can, by-and-by, provide for you and for them more than I do at present, so that they may live how and

where they please—if that is what you wish. You shall help me to do this. I shall write to old McLean to-night; how happy I shall make him! You would love and reverence that man, Rose."

"And now," asked Rose, a little anxiously, "what answer shall I get from Papa and Mamma? Guess! You know I wrote to them as soon as you were gone last night."

"What do you think yourself?—will they be displeased? Will they tell your brother to take you up to town to-morrow?"

"I do not think I shall have any verbal answer. I believe one of them will come down. I hardly know what they will say; by-and-by they will say Yes. Come and see if I am right."

Watching at the large drawing-room window stood Mrs. Lester. Rose uttered a cry of pleasure. Edmund gave her his hand to spring from her horse, and in the hall her mother met her, and took her in her arms.

"I told you," Rose said, turning to her lover, "that either Mamma or Papa would come down."

"You have enjoyed your ride, love, I see," said Mrs. Lester, with her arm about her daughter's waist, and speaking in her usual gentle and affectionate, though now trembling, tones. "I need ask no questions. You have shown this gentleman such perfect trust, as well as preference, that it appears to me, darling, there is nothing more to be said. Your father and I were surprised, but I think there is nothing for us to do. You have chosen, and we have but to concur in your choice."

Mother and daughter looked into each other's faces with a long, earnest gaze, and silently held each other close.

"Where is John?" asked Rose at last; "he was vexed with me this morning."

"He is with your aunt in the drawing-room. Come in to them."

"And Edmund?" said Rose, with a lovely blush, turning to him where he stood on the steps. "You have not spoken to him. Shall he go, or stay? Or tell me first, what did papa say?"

"He said, 'I should not have chosen thus for Rose,' but neither would your father have chosen me for you. You wrote to me Stay,

and I stayed. Rose is of age, and free to choose; she has chosen this man deliberately, with no adventitious inducements. You and I have been happy, Mary; why should not she? Tell her I am sorry—no, disappointed; but only disappointed because, in a selfish, short-sighted way, I had thought my daughter should form a better connection, in a worldly point of view.”

“Then papa was not vexed with me—not really sorry?” Rose said, slowly, pausing between her words as if weighing the meaning of what she had heard, and trying to realize the whole sweet thought that her father had virtually given his assent to her choice. “Do you hear? Do you understand?” she said, looking at Edmund with brimming eyes, and laying her hand in his. “I am very happy!”

Nothing could ever matter to her any more in which he did not bear a part. Now at once he must share her satisfaction, in her father’s sympathy with her, and his comprehension of her feelings.

Mrs. Lester smiled, and after a moment’s hesitation she went up and took Edmund by the hand.

"He must stay, of course, seeing that you wish it. Come in, and, if you have not already learned it, begin to learn how great a treasure we entrust to you. She has been our joy, her father's prime friend and favourite, and we give her up to you. Your love and care of her shall speak your gratitude to us. God so deal with you as you deal with her."

"Amen!" answered Edmund, with bent head, sealing his promise on the hand that still clasped his arm. "I cannot say much to you, Mrs. Lester," he went on; "words would stand me in little stead; they are easily spoken, and quickly passed; but let my whole life answer for my faith."

The few evening hours passed by rather slowly, for John Lester was not at all reconciled to present matters; but he forbore to make any adverse remarks, contenting himself with remaining aloof. Rose was silent too; but rather from a heart full of joy than one oppressed by any anxiety. Edmund alone was quite self-possessed; he was too natural, too simple-hearted to be over-mastered, and so rendered awkward, undignified, and disagreeable to

others, even by the height of joy. Giddiness, vertigo, were incompatible with a character like his, their very nature implies imperfection, incompleteness, instability: like the spring tide, the more it runs in upon the shore, so much the more does it recede. From the giddy height of passion the soul of man descends, through every variety of change, to the depths of despair, rising and falling, tossing to and fro, the sport of its own feelings, changing and inconstant.

Edmund Barton resembled rather a tideless sea, with waters full to either shore, rippled with gentle winds under a meridian sun of joy. In the fulness of his content he could afford to forego every outward demonstration of gladness. He had won; it was more gracious, more generous, to hide away every sign of triumph. Like a victorious hero serving his prisoner, he could for a time forget himself and his own happiness, in doing his utmost to make the hours less irksome and tedious to those who would fain have kept from him the desire of his heart. He talked to Mrs. Lester and Miss Blount in his own thoughtful

fashion, winning them away from personal cares and anxieties to wider interests. Until this evening he had been unconscious of possessing any influence—any power over the minds of others; but he rose equal to the occasion, and succeeded in drawing even the Vicar from the cold silence in which he had entrenched himself. To Rose he scarcely spoke, so strong and overwhelming was her attraction that, had he allowed himself to forget the claims that others had upon him, she would have engrossed him entirely. But he knew that her heart went with him; he knew that she listened with a double interest; he knew that her eyes rested upon him lovingly. Every now and then he turned towards her, as if to gain inspiration from her; rejoicing in her presence—in her very existence, knowing well that they had but one heart and mind between them!

There was no occasion to delay Rose's marriage. Her parents had given their consent to her being Edmund Barton's wife, and he was in receipt of a good salary as Miss Blount's manager. There were no serious disadvantages to



the match, and it was announced as arranged. Rose went back to London with her mother, and received many and various congratulations. Julia Barton wrote out of a heart full of sympathy and affection to welcome her new sister. Maud Vesey made a diplomatic call, having heard the report through Mrs. Fellowes, who paid a short and stately visit at long intervals to Mrs. Lester. Having satisfied herself that the report was true, she offered her congratulations in prettily chosen words; and when she left the room, she whispered to Rose in a bantering, condescending manner,

"Mr. Barton was a most agreeable person, I thought, and he deserved Mr. Vesey's epithet of '*le beau géant*' unquestionably. He could not dance I remember, but then" (and she shrugged her shoulders) "one never wants to dance with one's husband, you know!"

Mrs. Vesey wrote a long chatty letter the same evening to Gertrude Brabazon, full of all the news of London, and she told her incidentally of her friend Rose Lester's engagement.

Lady Riverford, who was in London, came to see Rose, and carried her off to spend some days

with her, inviting Edmund to meet her, and amusing herself by leaving them alone together all the long mornings, to read, talk, wander in the Park, or see the new pictures; and in the evening by accompanying them to the Opera, or inviting half-a-dozen pleasant people to dine.

"The only thing, my dear," she said to Rose one day, "that annoys me is that Barton and Ashley cannot change names and position. I meant you to have Beauchamp Ashley, though every time I see the other I know he is the fitter for you. Beauchamp might have improved himself instead of going on as he did, thinking that because he was an Ashley it did not matter whether he was idle, or stupid, or self-sufficient—and I never can forgive his gross blunder in letting you slip away from him. However, I am a gainer, for I shall have you near me, nearer than you would have been at Broadstone. You may soon come to live at the Warrens!"

"I knew that your heart was full of this girl," Lady Riverford said to Edmund, "but I doubted whether she would understand all your worth, or whether she had any heart to give you. That was why some time ago I bade you

not dream, but make your shadowy thoughts into realities; if you did not do this soon, and if she were not free, I felt sure your life would be wasted, or at least would be dwarfed and cramped, and you would be neither as happy nor as useful as you ought to be. I did not want you to waste yourself in a mere fruitless dream. A life of reflection and regret would with you sink into inanity; you are the man of action, the Hercules, the Thor, to subdue evil and wrong wherever you find it, and to fill that post rightly, as I take it, you need joy as well as suffering to strengthen and confirm you."

Lord Riverford chuckled over his superior wisdom, and playfully stroked his wife's cheek, saying he wished he had had a bet on his opinion. "I should have won it, my dear! It is doubly sweet to beat you at your own weapons, and on your own ground, where I confess myself usually worsted. You must admit that I was right when I told you your pretty friend would find the man that suited her sooner or later. And you thought he ought to be Ashley! Pooh! Ashley is a child compared with this man, and a selfish child too. I must own, though, if you

had brought me to book and made me name the winner, I should have named a man who seems to have been out of the running altogether. I mean Forteith; he is a thorough gentleman and very brilliant, I should think any woman would like him."

Lady Riverford began to laugh, she was tying the Earl's neckerchief, which was in its normal state of disarray, but she could not straighten the refractory bows. "Forteith!" she said, "how could you be so silly? Rose Lester is brilliant enough herself, she does not want to shine by any reflected light. He likes her immensely, and she admires him, but at a long distance, they would put each other out."

"Well, for my own part, I like Barton very much," said Lord Riverford, who rather liked being laughed at, "we shall be good neighbours, and I am heartily glad I did not buy the Warrens. I should have felt as if I had robbed him, and should never have been happy till I had made a present of it to his wife; for, hang the fellow, he is so deuced proud I should never have got *him* to take it back. They will come and live there some day, and I hope they'll enjoy it."

"And he will keep on Miss Blount's business in the town?" said Lady Riverford, interrogatively. "I am sorry sometimes when I think of so fine a young man being a timber-merchant."

"There be timber-merchants and timber-merchants," answered Lord Riverford, sententiously. "Barton will always hold his own; he will bide his time patiently, and you will see he will fill his proper place, and fill it well too. Anything is better than to be an idle man. Barton will come to the front when he is wanted; he is made of lasting stuff."

Gertrude Brabazon, too, came to see Rose. She had prevailed upon her mother long since to make Mrs. Lester's acquaintance, that she might have the pleasure of Rose's society when she could find her in London. Gertrude had been at Bournemouth all the early Spring, but in May she returned to town, and one bright morning her light, wavering footsteps entered—"like a wandering wind," Rose said—the drawing-room where Rose sat reading.

Gertrude was timid and shy, and not looking well, Rose thought and said. She confessed that she was not strong, that she fancied she had

taken cold at the Riverford ball in January; but that there was no need to talk about her—she was getting well now. With all her timidity Gertrude had a brave heart. Before she left Sussex Gardens she had nerved herself to ask—

“Rose, dear, I had fancied—was I wrong?—that there was something between you and Beauchamp Ashley. I wanted to ask you before, but it seemed to me so natural when I know so well what you both are, that I did not know how to begin to ask, because it would seem as if I were selfish—you are so much worthier and lovelier than I—and as if I were blaming either of you, although it is true that he is partly engaged to me, and that you knew how much I liked—loved him. I can ask now, because I need not blame you at all, and it will make me happier to know.”

“There is nothing between us, nor was there anything really then,” answered Rose quietly; “we have always liked each other. When I first knew him, I believe I indulged warmer fancies, but they have long been ended. You must not repeat this, Gertrude, because I have told you the truth about myself.”

Rose felt it was not for her to enter into any explanations about Mr. Ashley's conduct—with that she had nothing to do ; he must keep silence, or tell what he thought proper.

Beauchamp Ashley kept silence as to the past, when, shortly after Rose's marriage, he sought Gertrude Brabazon, and pleaded with her so well as to make her forget her former suspicions and anxieties, and consent to be his wife. He was good and gentle to her, careful of her smallest wish, but was a moody, self-engrossed man, living in Somersetshire, only spending a week or two at Broadstone occasionally, immersed in his books, sending forth at rare intervals a volume of poems into the world, and avoiding all general society. Gertrude did not know that she might have been happier—she had been accustomed all her life, from her own feeble health, and the decided tone of her mother's character, to give way to others and live in the shade ; she thought it was but her lot to sigh more than smile : her husband never gave her cause for tears. She took then, gratefully, her shadowed, neutral-tinted life, and did not ask for, did not even know that she, too, might

have lived in joy, had there risen for her a sun of happiness. The sad thing was that she did feel Beauchamp was not gay and joyous; she thought she remembered he used to be so, but now he was weary, always weary and absent in mind. His old friends shook their heads and whispered, "Utterly lost and wasted!" But he was proud, and withdrew himself from their observation. Rose and Gertrude wrote often to each other at first, but gradually the intervention of totally dissimilar interests, the long distance between them, the great difference in their lives, and the fact that they rarely or never met, sundered them almost entirely.

Once, after a lapse of many years, Beauchamp Ashley had occasion to send his servant home with his keys for his cheque-book and a memorandum. He wrote and desired Gertrude to seal in a packet what he wanted, which she would find in a given place in his writing desk. In that place she found also a little folded paper, with the flowers Edith Fellowes, Beauchamp's young cousin, had given him long before—Rose, Wild Thyme, and Rosemary: the paper was endorsed Rose Mary Lester, and dated with



the day and year on which the child had given him the emblems. Then Gertrude remembered that "Wild Thyme" was an old pet name her brothers had given to Rose Lester, and, sadder remembrance still, that Beauchamp, her husband, habitually wore a sprig of rosemary in his coat, that bushes of the shrub grew along his favourite shaded garden-walk, from which he would pluck the leaves and rub them in his hands as he walked slowly to and fro, ruminating. She replaced the dry plants, and sent the things her husband required. She never blamed him; she held the secret of his life in her hands, and held it gently and faithfully. She knew now that he was changed—that a settled sorrow had fallen upon him, which nothing in this world could ever lift. She was thankful, at least, he had never tried to lighten his load by recourse to any form of worldliness; he had not deceived nor stultified his own heart, he had not been untrue to himself.

There came a day of unusual expansion between them; such a day as may come to the least suited and least sympathetic of husbands and wives; and Gertrude relieved herself of

the burden of holding his secret without his knowledge, and told him of the packet of flowers she had found.

He told her the whole story of his acquaintance with Rose Lester.

"I loved her," he confessed, "and too late I knew that Love must have all or none. I lost her, and I go mourning. I grieve for you, Gertrude, because you deserved a better fate. But you are my friend—are you not?"

## CHAPTER XVII.

THE Vicar of Stonefield, in spite of his first feelings of annoyance with his sister for the choice she had made of a partner for life, and although he had felt relieved by her absence in London from the continual inclination to find fault with her, began at last to miss her sadly. His books and papers seemed to involve themselves in inextricable confusion—the servants were troublesome, and found him difficult to please—a great many people fell ill, and made him anxious—the school-children behaved badly at church, and neither the choir nor the organ satisfied his critical ear.

After the June hay-making, the schoolmaster came to consult Mr. Lester as to the annual school treat. The poor Vicar was at his wits' end.

"The fact is, Rose," he wrote, "you must

come back to me, if only for a short time. Nothing goes right without you. You left me in such a hurry that I cannot find anything. Certainly a man, especially an English clergyman, ought to have a sister, or a wife, to look after him. A wife! Heigho! If one could only find the right one!"

So Rose went back to Stonefield, where her mother joined her in July, glad to escape the weary hot days in London.

Edmund Barton came to and fro, and improved his acquaintance with the Vicar, who passed by regular gradations from toleration to a true liking and regard for the man who was soon to be his brother-in-law.

Walking back with her one Sunday, after the afternoon service, Edmund turned to Rose, whose soft white dress was brushing the odour from the lavender and mignonette growing alongside the narrow path that led from the churchyard into the Vicarage garden.

"Your music was sad to-day, my dearest. It struck me as strangely mournful. You are not unhappy?"

"Unhappy! oh no! But my great joy

makes me sometimes tremble; 'rejoice with trembling,' in fact. The instability of all human things makes me ever dread the possibility of change. The song of triumph does not seem fit for a heart laden with joy, but the song of grateful humility. In great sorrow and great joy one is nearer to God, and then one prays. Prayer is, I think, rather sad than joyful. In Heaven, we shall not pray, but praise—when we reach it, that is."

"You will help me to reach it, too."

"Would Heaven be Heaven without the presence of the Beloved? If God has given us this great joy of love here on earth, in this temporary abode of ours, can He deprive us of it in His everlasting mansions?"

Sitting the same evening with Rose at the open window in the moonlight, after Edmund had left, Mrs. Lester made some remarks about him, referring to his personal appearance, which pleased her, and the general bent of his character.

"I should hardly have expected his father's son to have become the man he is. One feels convinced at once of his perfect straightfor-

wardness; even in jest, he could not deviate from the truth. A child—an animal would trust him at once. But what was his attraction in your eyes? I have sometimes wondered. Do you mind telling me?"

"I believe it was his voice that pleased me most, mamma. I suppose you have remarked the peculiar musical tone it has—a voice that changes with every conceivable inflection, that deepens and softens with emotion or excitement, that is never loud, but penetrating, vibrating, and that could electrify if it rose into command or declamation. I believe every other human organ may deceive, but the voice never does. I do not mean to say that I *thought* about Edmund's voice when I first knew him, though now I feel sure it influenced me unconsciously; but when he returned from Australia, it was the first thing I remarked. I think it has gained in power, as his character has done."

"Perhaps; probably. He certainly has improved, altered in character wonderfully. I remember thinking him a fine-looking, good-natured, awkward youth; he is indeed changed. He is not assuming, not even self-asserting, but

like what you say of his voice, he penetrates, he gains supremacy."

"Only he is not changed, it is but that his character is developed—the evil has filtered through, the good remains. I wonder if I can tell you without blushing that he says he may thank me for his improvement. I believed good of him, trusted him, and gave him the chance, the inducement to be worthy of the faith I reposed in him, the kindness I showed him. He has always been so overwhelmingly grateful for my lending him some money. He says it made him learn to trust and respect himself. I know that it made me keep kind remembrance of him; it was an actual, however strange, bond between us."

"Well, Rose, you are happy," interposed the Vicar, coming across to the window from the lighted table where he had been writing: "I earnestly trust you may ever be so, and encounter as few life-storms as possible. I shall miss you terribly. I do not know what I shall do without you. I suppose I shall never marry. You and Margaret are both married, but James and I seem in no hurry to change our condition."

"James will not marry as long as mamma keeps him at home, and makes him feel necessary to her happiness," laughed Rose. "You men think it a great matter, I know, that you should be necessary to some woman's happiness; and until you suddenly find the particular 'she', your mothers and sisters fill the place very well. I am not finding fault with you, for I believe it to be a great, irrefutable truth. Now that I am going away, it may induce you to seek a companion for life."

"I do not know; perhaps I am difficult to please," said the Vicar musingly, with his head on his hand, his regular features cut clear in the moonlight, and the paleness of his complexion increased by the shadow of his large dark brows and his curling black beard. "Perhaps you have spoiled me a little, Rose, for ordinary people. I once thought a woman whom I knew for a short time was the type of my ideal, but it is long since I have seen her, and she is engaged to be married, or is married now, I fancy."

"I too," Rose answered low, "once had an idea of the sort, but I did not feel sure that you——"



"We need not speak of it, dear—it was a dream, and it is over. I do not imagine that I shall ever marry."

Brother and sister knew it was of Gertrude Brabazon they were both thinking, though they did not name her.

"It is not given to everyone in this world," John Lester went on after a pause, "to find the happiness that you have found. I need not say to you, be thankful for it, for I see in all you do and say the reflection of joy and gratitude."

"There has come over me a great silence and calm," she said. "I hold my breath as it were in presence of a holy secret. Some people have to wait so long for joy, and it has met me with both hands out-stretched. Not till late in life does peace often come, not till the burden and heat of the day are passed does one often find rest. I have found upon my way a guide, companion, friend. I can never be desolate, never comfortless, so long as his voice is near to counsel me, so long as his heart beats with mine, and that I can lean upon his breast."

"An earthly Paradise," said the Vicar slowly,

with a smile of something like doubt upon his lips, and his dark eyes gazed earnestly into the moonlight—"but after this world?"

"Can I not leave that question in the hands of the Author and Finisher? In my opinion that which we call perfect is but begun here: it is but a relative term, used in a finite sense: when the infinite is manifested to and in us all the perfection of the mortal must become eternal for the immortal. That which does not endure is not perfect, though we use the great word as representing to us the idea with which alone our souls are satisfied. Love, to be love, must be eternal. Death, instead of severing, does but more surely bind the cords of Love, because it weaves through them the new strands of faith and hope."

Rose Lester was married at her brother's church of Stonefield early in September. She preferred the fair surroundings of woods and fields to the dreary London streets; and Miss Blount, who would never have been persuaded to go to a London wedding, enjoyed the early drive across to Stonefield, when the dew was hanging in the rose and hazel branches that in-

tertained across the shady lanes, and lay thick in the cobwebs on the grass.

The children strewed flowers across the bride's path, and the villagers, who had learned to love and honour her, had turned out, whether church folk or dissenters, to see her pass and wish her joy.

"What are you thinking of, love?" Rose said, approaching her husband, as he stood alone in the bay of the drawing-room window, after their return from church.

"I was thinking, in a flash of thought," he answered, passing his arm round her, "of all the years that are gone since you and I used to meet each other in the morning, when you went to Riverford for your drawing-lessons."

She pressed her cheek against his shoulder, and he went on—

"I loved you then, as well as so young and unformed a man as I could love—stupidly and ignorantly; and then—I failed you. I ceased to go to meet you. I had no *right* to go. I began to understand the meaning of right and honour through you. I had a reason for my conduct then; I have never explained it to

you. I will explain it, if you wish, now; that reason no longer exists. I love you, and am yours, and I am here with your dear hand in mine."

"I told you before—I know all I wish to know," she said, with a smile.

When the tenancy of the Warrens expired, Edmund yielded to Miss Blount's wish that he should take his wife to live there, and that she should put the house and gardens in order for them, protesting that she had never made them any wedding-present. Miss Blount shortly afterwards altered Edmund's position from manager to partner in the business, and made a codicil to her will, leaving the wharves, yards, and premises to him and his heirs for ever.

McLean had been uneasy about "his boy," and determined at last to go and see him. He found Edmund living at the Warrens, and the cockatoo was hanging on his perch in the middle of the hall, swinging to and fro, as if he had never known the great forests of the West. When he saw the fair young wife Edmund had won, and had himself felt her kindness and

learned her worth, he was not surprised at his decision to remain in England, or at his long silence.

He observed Rose in his keen, considerate fashion; he waited upon her with the most affectionate solicitude and the most ceremonious courtesy; he often surprised Edmund by remarks that showed the deep insight he had gained of her character, and his warm appreciation of her. He was never tired of her society, and would sit reading quietly when she was otherwise engaged, or would talk to her when she was free to listen. He brought home for Edmund the head and fore-paws of his old favourite and companion, Laddie,—for the faithful creature was dead—and a sketch of the dog in crayons, which George Grant had made. Rose set the fine head on the dining-room mantelpiece, and treasured it greatly.

McLean went into Argyleshire to see his old home, and such of his friends as still remained. He had proposed to Christina to come to England with him, but she had declined the offer.

“Eh! what for wad I gang hame, maister?  
’Twad brak my hairt! ’Twad gar me greet.

Na, na,—auld Christie's jist weel here; ye maun let her bide. Ye'll gie my respects tae Maister Barton, an' I'm wushin' him weel. The Lord lift up his countenance upon him!"

McLean spent his last weeks in England at the Warrens, and after his return to Australia, Harry Dawson came over, and stayed with his sister, who was in London; but the attractions of East Anglia were greater, and, not having much time to spare, he made the most of it, and succeeded in persuading Edith Barton to emigrate with him, and brighten his own and McLean's, home in Queensland. McLean had been much pleased with her, and descanted on her good qualities to his partner, assuring him that, next to a Scotchwoman, an Englishwoman would make the best wife for a colonist.

When Edith left, Julia came home to live with her mother. Julia and Rose are friends and sisters in more than name.

After Ellen Durrant recovered from her severe illness, her husband took her into Devonshire, where he had relations. The doctors had recommended total change of scene, and George was minded, if he could get work that he liked, not

to return to Stonefield. He was very successful, and his cousins helped him with money and interest. He established himself at Exeter, where the other members of his family joined him after a time. Edmund Barton often saw a letter with the Exeter postmark lying near his wife's plate at breakfast, though he never had asked who was her correspondent. But it happened that when Margaret Grey returned from India, Rose went to meet her in London, and to spend a few days at her father's house. The day she left a letter had come from Exeter, and a second two days afterwards. Edmund sent on the first to Rose, but the sight of another surprised him. He thought some answer must be needed—some one dear to Rose must be ill and require help or counsel.

He opened it and read :

“DEAR MRS. BARTON,—I write one line to tell you myself I am doing nicely, and baby is a fine boy. George is as proud as can be. He wrote to you when baby was born, and I hope you had his letter. He is getting on so well: we are comfortable here, and like Exeter very

much. I am very grateful to God for sending me in sore trouble to friends like Miss Blount and you. I can never forget your goodness to me, nor leave off blessing you. But all has come right now, thank God. I think, and think, I can do nothing else ; it is all so wonderful to me.

“From your obedient and affectionate,

“ELLEN DURRANT.”

Edmund put the open letter into Rose's hand when she came home, and stood by her as she read without saying a word. She turned to him with a smile.

“I am so glad for Ellen,” she said, “and glad you know that I know all about this. I have known it for years. I told you, love, the day we were married, that I knew all I wanted to know. I was sorry that there should ever have been any evil spoken of you, for I feel you were right to go ; and I was sorry that poor Ellen had to suffer from your thoughtlessness—but—we have all something that must make our friends sorry, I fear, at some time or other, and you are so much better and nobler a man for your trials.”



“Remember not, Lord, the sins and offences of my youth,” said Edmund softly with bended head. “Oh, my darling, my darling! who have always believed in and trusted me, you then ‘hold it truth,’

‘That men may rise on stepping-stones  
Of their dead selves to higher things.”

THE END.

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